

SOUND & FURY

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Avila University • Kansas City

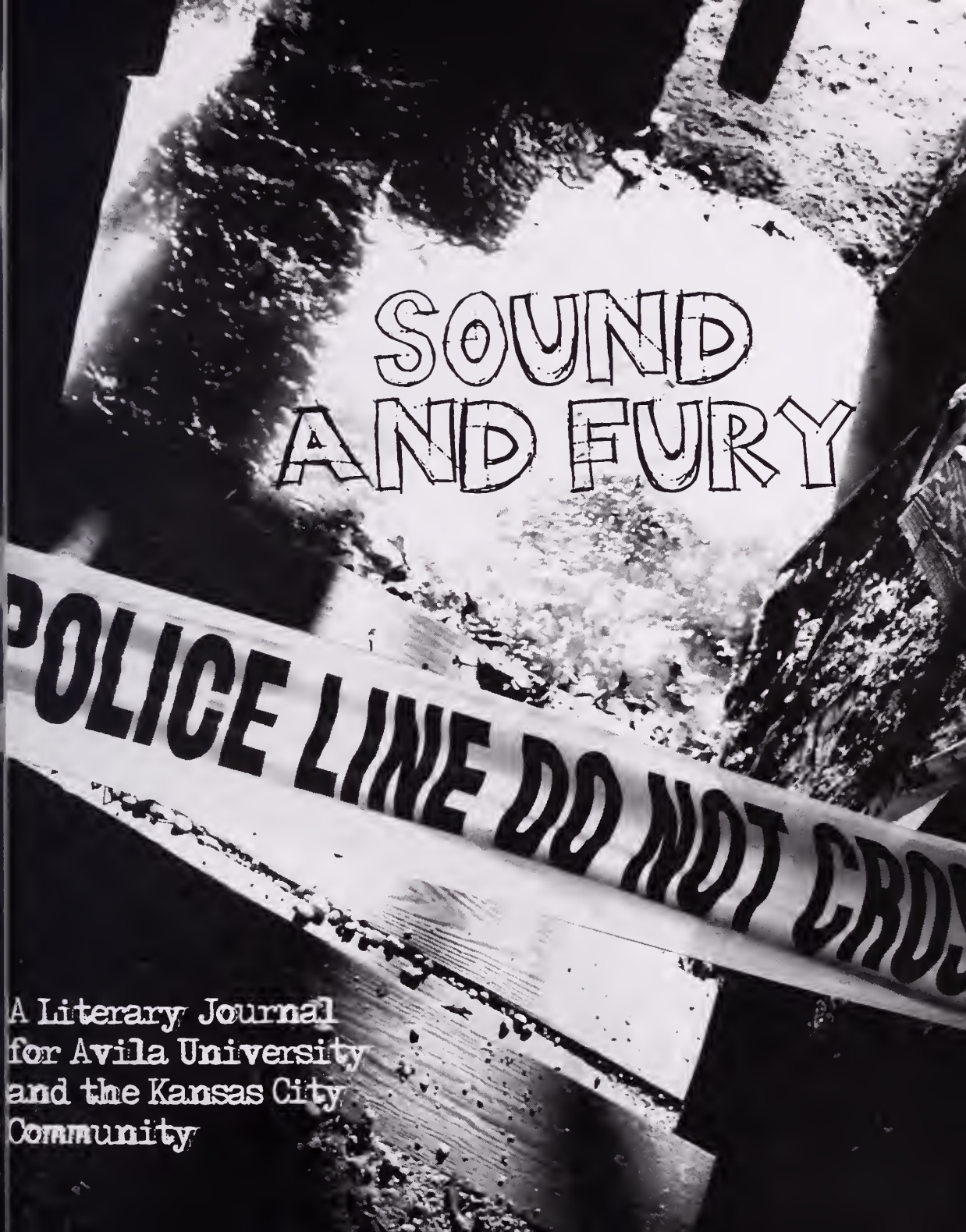
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SOUND AND FURY

POLICE LINE DO NOT CROSS

A Literary Journal
for Avila University
and the Kansas City
Community



Awards

Poetry Award

Satellite Gods *by Melanie Briend*

Essay Award

Is It Eventually Yet? *by Emma Pryor*

Fiction Award

The Lord's Supper *by Matt Little*

High School Creative and
Scholarly Writing Competition

Ghost Dance *by David White*
The Barstow School

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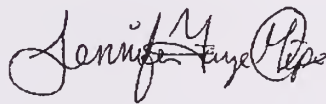
Designer Debbie Seigler

From the Editor

When listening to music or watching a film or a competitive sport, many of us become susceptible to that energy being transferred to ourselves and leave the event or moment feeling a heightened sense of emotion. Literature, too, has the power to ignite a spark within us in a powerful way. Choosing words is not only about finding what sounds the best or looks the most appropriate on the page; it is about digging up what will most clearly convey a message or picture to the reader. It is, after all, words that have the unique ability to transport our minds to new worlds and often bring the heart of their authors to lay bare and open on the page.

The *Sound and Fury* literary journal is more or less a continuation of the *SCOP* of last year and is dedicated to the passion and craft of writing, celebrating the voices of Avila students, and to the inclusivity of this university. The members of the editorial staff and I have poured over a great deal of material in order to bring our readers this first edition of the magazine. This could not have been accomplished without the support and guidance we have received from Dr. Charlene Gould and Dr. Nancy Cervetti. I would also like to thank English Chair Dr. Tony Michel for his inspiration and Artist-in-Residence Stanley E. Banks for his expertise and encouragement. I would also like to thank our graphic designer Debbie Seigler whose dedication has been a vibrant and intrinsic part of this publication. Furthermore, I would like to thank the editorial staff for lending their voices and for their patience and persistence in this process.

It is our hope that you will enjoy reading the *Sound and Fury* and that it ignites that passion for the art in you as it has us.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jennifer Eyring". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jennifer" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Eyring".

Sound and Fury Editor-in-Chief

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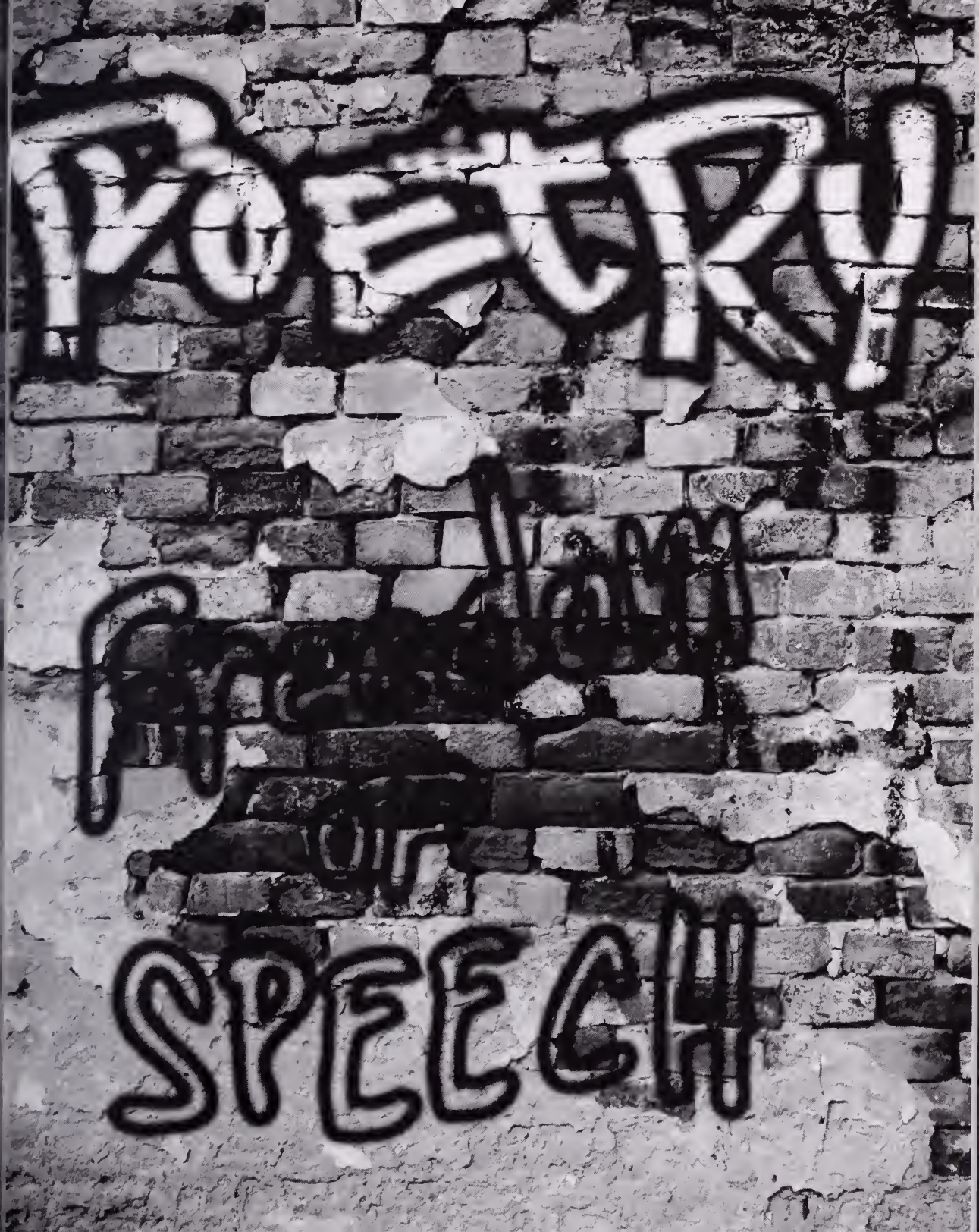
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POETRY

Freedom

SPEECH

To Walter Bargaen

On behalf of the English Department (faculty and students), Editors of **SOUND AND FURY**, Avila University's Student Literary Magazine, and the entire Avila University Community, I would like to thank Walter Bargaen, the **first Poet Laureate of the State of Missouri**, for allowing us to publish three of his poems. "The Civilized Sacrifice" was published in his book, **Remedies for Vertigo**, and "Ice Bound" was published in another book of his titled **West of West**. Further, he has given us a new unpublished poem for **SOUND AND FURY** titled "Days Not to Come." We are truly honored that he would permit us to include his eloquent words in our first edition of **SOUND AND FURY**. We hope that you will enjoy and be enlightened by all of the wonderful literary work included in this first edition.

Respectfully Submitted,
Stanley E. Banks, Advisor
Assistant Professor & Artist-In-Residence
Avila University

Days Not to Come

Blue ice, days of white-out, then all-night sun:
she holds out her hand, shaky fingers spread
wide as possible, palm opened upward,

clearly displaying what she thinks is forgotten,
what she always knew. She holds up
her hand, a red glove that runs

the many creases of her skin—seal blood
swims backward toward her elbow and the sea,
all that swims with her through the Elder Center.

Outside the window, head-high drifts,
gale-force winds wrap endless scarves
of snow over the tundra. This is what she knows

as an Inuit, this is what she lived on,
living on the living. She will throw herself
into a century of snow, when the time comes.

The Civilized Sacrifice

I have climbed the backs of gods too. It's not so
strange, dressed in heavy coat and boots, hat
pulled down to the eyebrows, cheeks windburnt,
gloved fingers numb, and each brief breath prayed

upon, each step thrown onto the loose altar of stone.
Blinded by spires of light, I've looked away
as the unblemished blue splintered in all directions.
And I've backed away from the sheer

precipice, the infinite suddenly a fearful measure,
the way down to tundra and the jagged maze of
granite, leaving only a crevice in which to cower.
I've lain on the steep slopes of night under spruce,

wrapped against rain and cold, and watched clouds
explode in my face. Stark boughs reached
then sagged back in a sweeping, resolute silence.
I was shaken loose by thunder and lightning,

like the small girl, named Juanita by strangers.
She tumbled a hundred yards down
Nevado Ampato peak, her whereabouts unquestioned
for five hundred years until a nearby volcano

began a festering eruption, thawing the slope,
and wrapped in her illiclia shawl woven in the ancient
Cuzco tradition, wearing a toucan- and parrot-feathered
headdress, her frozen fetal posture a last effort

at warmth above tree line amid ice fields, there
to address and redress for rain and maize, for
full vats of fermenting beer, plentiful llama herds,
for the civilized sacrifice, to be buried alive and wait

in private, as we all do to speak with our gods, hoping
to appease, to know, to secure the illusive cosmic
machinery, and in that last numb moment her left
hand gripped her dress for the intervening centuries.

Ice Bound

Sky's gray sheet spreads icy rain.
Through the night we heard the branches cracking.
Now they bend with the bowed ache of apostrophes.
Backs to the window, sitting on the couch, we listen
as the radio announces the list of schools closed.

An hour earlier I inched my way along
the road, tires spinning toward the ditch.
Now I read aloud to a teenage daughter,
who tolerates my foolishness, my claim
that Lao Tzu traversed a more slippery world.

With two books open on my lap, one in my hand,
two on the floor, I'm surrounded by imperfect
translations: a gathering chaos; something
mysteriously formed; without beginning,
without end; formless and perfect.

She responds, Sure,
I knew that, so what? I persist:
that existed before the heavens and the earth;
before the universe was born. She's ready to go
upstairs and listen to the radio. I ask,

What was her face before her parents were born?
she answers, Nothing. I ask again.
She says it again. Where are the angels,
nights on humble knees, the psalms of faith,
the saints of daylight? She walks out of the room.

I'm surrounded by thin books.
How pointless to go anywhere on this day,
or maybe any other, but then
the time comes when there is
no other way but to stand firm on ice.

for Kale Rose

Metaphorescent

His head is the wall;
All the wall holds in is him.
He is Soviet General Secretary of the Communist Party
With a reddish blue stain near the white ceiling.
Democracy is American President Ronald Reagan wailing
"Mr. Gorbachov, tear down this wall!" through eye windows,
"I wanna get me some!" down the mouth door.

As the free world wind of drivel-down markets pushes in,
Over the wall flee countless tyrannies, Yul Brenner,
Genuine Petrograd vodka, gulag peccadilloes,
Rusted Iron Curtain rods.

Last to fling forth is all
Gorby below the jaw—
Nothing but a fresh gray uniform—
His feet clumsy furniture rattling across the
Rocky plain of one man one vote.
A purple trademark checkmark scorch-
Validates his brow, his head now a
Worn-down dam, the wall.

Whale Domination

Girl loved to shoot her gun at fish and some
Times mammals too; she rose at dawn one day
And filled her pipe with hash, her flask with rum,
Her rifle with twelve twenty-twos for play,

As "Prelude to a Faun" she bade her i-
Pod croon. She walked to sea but stopped at beach
Where families and old folks straggled by;
Then drunk and stoned she cocked her cheek to breech.

A whale performance artist leapt offstage
To snag a prop for *Mammalfish—That's Me*
Before the gun could pop. He brought a cage,
Fin-whacked her in, dove back beneath the

Sea—girl and gun locked in sin, bounced up and down
While other whales grinned, sang and watched her drown.

Operation Domestic Tranquility

Slim lime praying mantis seeks liberty atop
An ash branch, rear leg pulling forward,
But tugged back by old spider bungee cord.
Seeing this, I have to stop.

I call the praying mantis an Iraqi, the web Saddam,
And believing peace to be release,
I remotely guide my silent thumb;
Like a swift pacific Samurai I slash the Sunni silken bond.

Faith-healed, frisky, the male never notices me.
Marching to his mantisfeast destiny, he entangles
At the trunk with a tan she-mantis
I call Al-Qaeda Civil War Insurgency.

By rules of engagement she pickpockets his spunk,
Eats him alive while I continue shopping.
The ash is like Walmart—pretty crocus husks,
Crumbly bark—if only I could buy that natural junk.

For though I know of genocide, female circumcision, slavery,
The Chinese in Tibet and Taliban in Afghanistan,
I try to release myself like mantis from man
And earnestly coexist with destiny, all in one peacefully.

Nobility amongst Nobles with an Intoxicating Presence

Unquestionable is the need for his company during most decent conversations. Throughout history he has been the chaperone for many graceful events. Maybe seen as being somewhat feminine, I assure you he mixes with most masculine of crowds. Considering he may flow like the river of passion or fill the cups with wrath. Compatible with almost any situation, he's a perfect puzzle piece in life's jigsaw. A clever bunch with his streamline physique causes the average person to consume his intellect with a tongue-wrapping smile of acceptance. Most lovers would be terrified of his affection due to how equally he provides his services. Whether green with envy or purple with curiosity, it's impossible to view his emotion without seeing merely a shiny reflection of your own wonders.

Epitome of the Live Wire

She is the manifestation of raw energy with no time for the likes of you normal folk. A stunning wild bombshell coexisting in an electric yellow aura that only rivals the sun -commands the envy of all who witness her strut. She only has love for the idea and never the words that are actually spoken. Therefore she's often seen as being self centered or snobby and is constantly the recipient of jealous comments. Yet, one will find that in her race to be at the top of society, she actually is imitating the ones she attempts so harshly to be better than. It seems as if the outer glamour is for show as she's hesitant to allow true consumption of her spiritual juice, which leaves us puckered in amazement. We all can see the light she brings, but she feels darkness within. She has control of her emotions and is truly a force to be reckoned with. She maintains her super sour personality in small bottles, but knows when to add them to situations, causing the complete alteration of taste and flow. Suddenly we all realize that though we can't stand her completely, we are much obliged to sample her in small drops.

Fallen Foe

Myself, I see in me a fallen foe
To dog the common clash aroused in night,
Not knowing shadows from the sunlit glow.

Rigid creases consuming head to toe
Peer into me, the drawer vacant with fright;
Myself, I see in me a fallen foe.

Fluttering wings of owls in noonday show
Tall strut of a hidden hider in heights,
Not knowing shadows from the sunlit glow.

Draining drowned life breaks me to see the flow
And it is I, wherein belongs this blight—
In me to see, myself, a fallen foe.

Not gift but force within the skull, I know.
Can others see like me the ugly might—
Do they know shadows from the sunlit glow?

Mirror, empty demon, only you know
How easy blue eyes yearn to turn and smite
Myself, I see in me a fallen foe
Not knowing shadows from the sunlit glow.

5:11 PM

Memories are ink in pens
Close to the kill-shot of a soldier
Off duty

Like the frown of a blonde
Lingering, lucky to be called Queen
By no man

The metal pipes of a closed
Faucet always running rank,
Cold water

A peaked purpose in ripened rugs
Sitting to hide dying dirt
Faultlessly

Records stuck on scratching
And playing the wrong songs for
An old dime

An eagle eye cannot hold
The picture that disappears the moment
It exists

Time is only air that kissed
A sparrow's back as he fell
To the ground.

Satellite Gods

Fragile, rusted satellite gods
Crumbling with age
Alone in eternal space
Long silent
Disintegrating with supernovas
Down to a misunderstanding world
Befriended only by
The dreamers,
The comet chasers
Below
The ones who greedily gobble up
shredded scraps of blazing stellar sheet metal
And watch the night skies,
the origins,
for more
Praising partially-rusted copper souls
For another day's hope
Another reason to believe
Someone out there knows
Somewhere out there,
Someone sees.

The Jacket

I wrap this scent around me
Protect me from otoño!

Memory's greatest jog sends me back
To spray paint and mold that lingers in my nose
Cold concrete and grime rise to my fingertips
My ears and lips drink in Avenged Sevenfold
Shout to him and he heard only me
We were each other's in someone else's house.

Deep breath reminds me where I am
The year has changed and so have we
Dark attic hides black ink of journals closed
The House is someone else's now
Their bench press is a hazard in our basement
I call to him and he never replies.

Those marvelous moments have passed
Like this jacket from person to person
It was his before and filled with this nostalgic fragrance,
It passes back around to me and I almost forget
That I don't love him anymore.

Good Lust

In love do all you think you must
A ghost is all you have to be
No love exists without good lust

In death we fall into the dust
And love is all we have to see
In love do all you think you must

Love can become a cold, sad gust
Of wind that chases out the glee
No love exists without good lust

Some let a cracked and bitter crust
Imprison love – it should be free
In love do all you think you must

It's true that without joy and trust
A vice the evil lust can be
No love exists without good lust

Your full heart should be fit to bust
Your sweet body in ecstasy
In love do all you think you must
No love exists without good lust

Dusty

Silence sweeps
the dust away
the floor so clean now
for everyone's dirty feet
mud-caked shoes
and fungi
or dog shit
from last week

And the silence makes it
clean for you
while our feet
make it dirty

These days,
only Christ washes feet.
no one's seen him
since they left him
hanging

And you never leave
a man hanging.

And the dust blows away

“And so it goes...”

as Billy Pilgrim

would say

Out the window

mixing with the

air, mixing with

pollens,

it goes

into my nose

teasing my nostrils

blocking my sinuses

and I sneeze.

West Nile

Mosquitoes have wings
lights have halos
liars make miracles
cheating wives
dress in all white

Hungry Wolves will
find love
sharks will stay
true to their mates
dolphins cheat, though

The blood bleeds
Red
The rose smells
Red

Mosquitoes have
wings
eyes
mouths
tongues—like angels
like little
buzzing
angels -
wasps are angels too
bringing pain
to exposed skin
to show

that they know
you know
they care.
If they didn't,
why would they bother?

Women are like angels too
without wings and stingers
they bring sharp emotions
to exposed skin
to show they know
that we know
nothing of ourselves

And the roses
smell like roses
and the roses
smell like blood
and the blood
stains the stingers
and the women
buzz away
because all angels
are mosquitoes
and the mosquitoes
are women
and the bites
always itch worse
after they've
flown away.

Truth in Fiction, Forging Lies Laced in Gold

Truth in fiction, forging lies laced in gold
Man, Merchant, smith of his trade, evil seed
The bold smith boasts until his fraud unfolds

He sells youth, pounds energy from age old
Forces his steel hammer, fuses their greed
Truth in fiction, forging lies laced in gold

The man cheats girls with their beauty untold
Tricks them to buy what they seemingly need
The bold smith boasts until his fraud unfolds

His career takes flight, his boasting turns old
Gloating, hearing cold threats he does not heed
Truth in fiction, forging lies laced in gold

At last enough has come, the truth's been told
Rightful persecution, charlatan's plead
The bold smith boasts until his fraud unfolds

Ways of craft and citizen abuse fold
Merchant of deceit signs his own death deed
Truth in fiction, forging lies laced in gold
The bold smith boasts until his fraud unfolds

Fiction Falling From The Sky

My coat can't handle
Your numbing tendrils, weaving
Themselves through stitches.

Soft penetration
A moonlit requisition
Envelope me. Breathe.

Evanescence

How pale are bears that cling to ice
Like furry fluffy sails on jagged yachts'
Lazy swirl round the arctic circle
Where they once skated, angels on a pin.

Then came toxic assets
The loss by degrees of
Investments in now-liquid realty.

After bailouts bears
Pay themselves bonuses
And pray for a hard winter
To reunite their flotilla,
Restore the flow.

Thanksgiving

Day jerks forward, backward darts;
Licks my stomach quick and clean,
Bathes me dry as it departs.

Fog pullulates, billows, farts
Pillows of malted vanilla sunsteam.
Day jerks forward, backward darts.

Sediment into deeper furrows starts,
Accretes, hardens, tries to gleam,
Bathes me dry as it departs.

Minutes are trains of hour parts—
Though steady time may briefly seem,
Day jerks forward, backward darts.

Wet warmth that love imparts
Is salt in sad or passion stream;
Bathes me dry as it departs.

Blood flows out then in my heart;
Pools there in my final scene.
Day jerks forward, backward darts,
Bathes me dry as it departs.

Life Sentence

People of Kansas City, have pity!
At bottom I am addicted to good meat and produce.
Yet the blood of refugees clings
To the feet of bees in Argentina,
And contaminates my honey.

I cannot have relations;
My sentence does not permit me.
I was committed for using every meat
As means—deserving little, yet I
Suffer from bad jokes.
I receive my mail here, below heaven.

Opposing members of the same sex
Have stuffed their back seats and left
Me behind like a grocery cart.
The sweet, butter-colored vision of cows
With their vile, humanly quirks—
Swaying years of nodding careers,
The recoiling teams of flies; why,
It is a magnificent destruction in my behalf.
If one lives, one has shoes!
Indeed I've run out of rug.

Offend in order to interest!
I maintain Kansas Citians
Would be perishable in my behalf.
One must pay anything for an opposite
Idea, yet I daresay I've had enough no play
At the bottom rung, spun twirling across
The thrashing floor of history.

Save me, my correspondents.
Must the foot that offends walk forever?
While my hair smoke is savored in heaven,
I am shaved below for revelation.
While dandled darlings scowl,
Rubbery udders squirt me from flowers.

Incoherence

It's not consistent, bickering with unstable floating dark matter longing for a spark... despite the hesitation and the frustration relative to the epochs of time, temporary lakes of infinite energy transcend every perception of color and whisper coated wavelengths multiplied by primes of the square root of existence, contradictory (to nothing) and catalyzed by unorganized chemical, organic and arbitrary reactions, dwelling on the past...

Rapha-el

Everyday players arise champions
Sneaking behind houses
Snatching white porcelain
Lotus blossoms of suburbia and ghettos.

Painted pickled pimps soured sweet.
Sickly soothing skinny
Bare bones and baggy eyes
Bumbling about bruised skin.

Bleeding white satin becomes stone
Leaving behind all visions of future.
Dreams are the stardust of sandwich
Baggies and things sold on the corner.

Work weary whores hide half-hopes
Beyond brick buildings and bracelets.
Buffets for bears and bees forget fogs
Or faces for fear of true freedom.

Real Eyes Realize Real Lies

The wind carries rumors,
it whispers a name.
The hopes and dreams
of tainted wings
are buried all in shame.
He tried hard to love them;
to cover all the pain.
But Angel tears can't hide the fault
that courses through his veins.

His life is enigmatic.
He'll make it on his own.
But where's the point of living life
if you must live it all alone?
Maybe it's not worth it.
He'll never have a home.
But a promise is a promise.
His efforts won't be thrown.

The feathers that carry the fallen
move softly through the night.
He used to strive
for better life,
But something in him died.
This fallen outlaw Angel,
Whose dark wings are torn and tried;
The world is on his shoulders,
and Hell is at his side.

ESSAYS



CENSORED

The National Weather Service: Nature as the Other

Waking up, I feel the warm sun hug my skin as beams of light creep through the bedroom window. My thoughts harmonize with birdsongs that penetrate the thick walls of my house. These lovely sensations inform me that dark and claustrophobic winter is retreating, and the Earth is finally expanding with the arrival of spring. I get out of bed to let my dogs outside. I open the backdoor. Immediately, a gust of frigid air sweeps around the corner and slaps me in the face. I swear I can hear the wind laughing at my expense. I withdraw to the warmth of my house, and look outside at the tiny budding perennials, stretching out of the hard, unforgiving ground, tediously reaching for the sun. We were fooled, the plants, the birds, and I. At that moment I turn off my intuition and turn on the weather channel. Those meteorologists always seem to know more about my present than me.

The National Weather Service is a signifying system that is an integral part (parole) of the larger phenomenon of modern western culture, where knowledge of the natural world is dependent on the binary opposition between nature and culture (langue). In *Beginning Theory*, Peter Barry defines a signifying system as “any organized and structured set of signs that carries cultural meanings” (47). Thus, the signs that compose the weather channel can only be understood in relation to the larger structure in which they function which, in this case, is the duality between human culture and the natural world. Culture is a human construct, which serves as a system in which meaning is created and communicated. Of course, culture is not separate from everyday material reality; instead, it is embedded within and guides the social, material, and political reality of a given society. Thus, culture functions through circulating ideologies and values, which in turn define that culture and its means of production. Most productions in modern western culture, like the weather station, depend on the opposition between nature and culture in order to gain meaning and value.

Human beings have the unique evolutionary trait of language, which is employed as a means for imposing structure and order onto our experience of the natural world. This serves as a way of understanding, and thus successfully adapting to our environment through the process of communicating knowledge. In *The Long Revolution*, Raymond Williams says, “Man’s version of the world

he inhabits has a central biological function: it is a form of interaction with his environment which allows him to maintain his life and to achieve greater control over the environment in which this must be done" (34). Modern culture in the west functions largely through the epistemology of objective, scientific empiricism (not to be confused with, but not too far from Imperialism), whereas the natural world can be understood as a separate and knowable object. In order for modern culture to thrive, and keep its identity as progressive, stable, and innovative, nature, the unknown, must be objectively understood, tamed, and then used for the "development with a purpose" of human beings, who sit undisturbed on the right side of GOD/Science.

For western culture to maintain its hegemonic force in the world, nature must continue to be subjected to its cultural re-presentations. These signs point to the scientific domination of modern culture over nature. The weather station serves this function through representing nature in a linear and predictable fashion, so as to calculate and communicate systems of atmospheric pressure and weather moving throughout the United States. Nature is refigured through a series of signs, created by the technology of modern science, to convey weather "patterns." These representations provide a sense of stability, control, and predictability for humans as we continue on in the world, feeling as though we are one step ahead of those scary forces of nature that always seem to be lurking around the corner, waiting to remind us of our own insignificance in the larger cosmological picture.

Through the weather channel, space and time are condensed into secure sequences that serve to orient one as "on top" of and separate from the natural world. The huge map of the United States (only) is situated on the television screen with clearly defined boundaries between each state. Once one looks past the boundaries of the US everything turns blue, as if the world of tamed and predictable nature begins and ends right here in the US! The weather patterns, represented by color codes and loopy arrows, move in a linear fashion, left to right (like written English), over the surface of the earth/US. One is situated above or separate from time, as the panorama reveals what is happening now, as well as what is going to happen in the future, at least in the next seven days or more precisely, the next 10,080 minutes. One can also glimpse one's place in the larger context of the history of weather, as the current temperatures are compared to record breaking "highs and lows" in past years. One meteorologist stands in front of an enormous map of the United States, which displays various arrows and currents swirling from left to right. She swoops her arms in the direction of Texas and says, "We're gonna

show you where you're going, where you've been, and where you should be. It's all a whole big story."

The story narrated by the weather station is, again, dependent on the larger narrative of modern culture in the west, a narrative that rests on the fundamental assumption that humans are separate from the natural world. This narrative is the result of a (sort of) collective perception that is circulated and reinforced through the interaction between signs and their recipients. Language, the primary system of signs, is used to communicate what is happening "out there." However, it is important to note that signs are not essentially connected to anything outside of the signifying system, like the actual reality of nature. The relationship between the signifier and the signified is entirely arbitrary. Instead, signs, through their relationships with other signs, relationships that are guided by certain conventions, designate a new reality, or story. Thus, reality in this sense, is created and maintained by humans, and in turn, guides the interaction humans have with their environment. Williams says, "These facts of perception in no way lead us to a late form of idealism; they do not require us to suppose that there is no kind of reality outside of the human mind; they point rather to the insistence that all human experience is an interpretation of non human reality" (36). While there may be a reality separate from the one imposed by the human mind, that reality is inaccessible through sign systems, or the structures sustained by them.

As culture is created and maintained through signifying systems, it becomes a structure in itself. In *Structuralism and Semiotics*, Terrence Hawkes refers to Jean Piaget's definition of structure. He says, "Structure, he argues, can be observed in an arrangement of entities which embodies the following fundamental ideas: the idea of wholeness, the idea of transformation, and the idea of self-regulation" (5). The signs that make up modern culture function through a set of intrinsic laws that, like any system of values, reveal the identity of modern culture in opposition to what it is not. Hawkes says, "the true nature of things may be said not to lie in the things themselves, but in the relationships which we construct, and then perceive, between them" (7). Through signifying systems, like the weather channel, nature becomes the "Other" through which culture defines itself.

It is clear, from this point of view, that even though scientific empiricism is a deep seated value in modern culture, one that informs many tightly held ideologies, true objective knowledge is impossible through signifying systems like language, or the weather channel. In *Woman Native Other*, Trinh T. Minh-ha discusses the nature of language. She says, "You can no doubt capture, tame, and appropriate

it to yourself, for language as a form of knowing will always provide you with Your Other" (53). Thus, language by its very nature is dualistic. However, the binary opposition between nature and culture "appears" to be a natural duality, given that it has been the product of a functioning epistemology ever since the rise of modernity in the 18th century. With the emphasis of this influential tradition being on secular knowledge and objective understanding, the nature culture binary served to reinforce humanist ideologies, or the inherent power of human beings to create their world, even in the face of the "wilderness." Furthermore, this binary has served the purpose of giving meaning to countless relations of power, which in turn have guided the fundamental assumptions and actions of modern culture in the west: a culture that exists through manipulating, consuming, and actually living off of the Other. Minh-ha says, "language is one of the most complex forms of subjugation, being at the same time the locus of power and unconscious servility. With each sign that gives language its shape lies a stereotype of why I/i am both the manipulator and the manipulated" (52). As language is used to communicate reality, one not only manipulates that reality, but in turn, becomes a slave to it, as it shapes one's framework for experiencing the world.

The nature culture binary is a human constructed filter that shapes the way we interact with our environment. Seeing the natural world through this particular window has only brought devastation to the natural environment and indigenous people (also considered nature). As modern culture expands and dominates, there is continual manipulation and homogenization. Nature gets grouped under one category; it is all that must be civilized and used for the progress of human culture. They are seen as resources, whether they be land, people, water, ancient sunlight (oil), used for the expansion of "the civilized human world." The weather channel is a signifying system that functions under the nature culture binary, and reinforces nature as the other, through both its form and content. This binary has been so powerful in modern culture that it seems easy to forget that it is a human construction, a window that has been validated and reinforced through sign systems. This window must be taken apart and examined. It is absolutely necessary to understand the nuts and bolts that keep this window so firmly intact. Once there is understanding we can begin to change the story.

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New Age Ninja Turtles

There were four of us. The night began as any other night would have. Any other night that is that consisted of pub crawling, senseless, side bursting jokes that are forever lost in the obscurity of alcohol stained memories, and pick up lines tossed and wasted only to be tossed again and again until some fish finally bites at the bait. James, the oldest of us, was our designated driver. Though, I can't recall why he was chosen for the job since he had the most used and abused liver of us all. Perhaps it was because his car held us all the most comfortably. The rest of us: Jason, Jeremy, and I all just hoped to make it back home in one piece.

After the final bar had closed its taps and its doors to us and our cause, we headed home. I remember laughing the entire way, at what though escapes me. Finally by James' careful driving and God's good grace I suppose, we were sitting in James' driveway, all alive and all in one piece. It was during this conclusion of the evening, marked by the normal parting commentary of the evening wrap-up and the traditional high fives and knuckle pounds, that we heard it. A woman's scream ripped through the neighborhood from just around the corner. As its echo died away we could hear the building crescendo of an argument between a man and his old lady. However, this argument sounded like it had just passed the point of discussion and was about to wave bye-bye to the whole "civil conversing" side of it all together. A yell like that usually meant only one thing: somebody needed help and they needed it immediately. Enter the four heroes. Our laughter and jovialness had passed. It was time for action.

The four of us ran, if that's what you want to call it, drunkenly down the street and around the corner. The summer air was still with the tension we all shared and our paths carried us in zig-zags down the street. The art of straight line running, let alone walking, was no longer within our ability, yet our resolve remained strong. We were going to save the day. I was following Jeremy, the was the biggest of us all. We had affectionately referred to Jeremy as our ATM, for how long I don't remember. Basically, he was the one that cashed the checks our mouths wrote for us. Nobody ever wanted to take a withdrawal from the ATM that was Jeremy. If any of us had ever backed ourselves into a corner with trouble, whether our fault or not, Jeremy would break through a wall to get us out of the predicament. Jason, the most gung-ho of our bunch, led the way down the street, lit only by the lone

street lamp on the corner. He could smell a fight and, like a bird dog, he was damn determined to be there in it.

We arrived on the scene a few houses down. A man had his wife held by her throat in their yard. Her screams, which had just earlier split the night, were now stifled by his much larger frame. And boy do I mean larger. This man was somewhere around five-foot-forty inches, pissed, raging, and a shit ton meaner than any of us. His wife looked like this wasn't her first time at the rodeo either as she kicked and clawed at him, shoving her curses through exasperated gasps and grunts.

Jason arrived first and threw himself towards the man, knocking his grasp off the woman's throat and stumbling across the dew sprinkled grass. As we all approached the front yard, the lady scrambled away from us, retreating back up the steps of the porch. The man's rage now turned to Jason and he lunged himself at my friend. The two went down, tumbling over each other down the steady slope of the yard and over each other again and again. By this time, Jeremy, James, and I were in the yard with them. Jason eventually ended up on his back with the man sitting atop him and preparing to unleash his wrath. Jeremy and I rushed to them as James stayed behind, calling the police from his cell phone. The man was able to launch one good shot down onto Jason before we were on them and pulling the hulking monster off of our friend.

The man stood, staggering, and immediately charged Jeremy, the bigger of the two of us. You could have presented this man a medal for the open field tackle that he laid down upon my best friend. He was instantly on top of Jeremy, raining down punch after punch to his body and the sides of his head, yet never fully getting a clear shot. Jason was down but slowly pulling himself up, James was still on the phone, and Jeremy was seconds away from having his skull permanently dented like an ashtray. I had to do something and I had to do it fast. That's when I saw it. It was an innocent looking thing at first, so serene and ambiguous that it had gone unnoticed as the entire event played out in the yard. It was a front yard decoration, a Precious Moments birdbath, a concrete disk atop a concrete pillar. In haste, I scooped up the bowl, its water spilling out over the sides and lightening my load slightly. In a quick, half drunken stumble/graceful forward fall, I brought the disk down hard over the back of the man's neck and shoulders. He went limp and fell off Jeremy, rolling rigidly to the side.

It was then that our little party was interrupted by the ear-splitting sirens of police cruisers as the split through the night around the corner and sped towards

us. The man moaned slightly and stayed down in the grass, the night dew dampening his clothes in water marks and grass stains. His lady, our damsel in distress, quickly leapt from the porch and moved towards him. Her concern was for his safety and well-being, both questioning if he was alive and cursing our intrusion in the same sentences. We all gathered back together, just in case the man got a second wind, but he never rose from the ground.

The cops pulled up to the curb, their red and blue cherries reflecting off every house on the block and illuminating the night like noontime. Following the arrival of the shield bearing cavalry, everything took a turn for the awkward and confusing. We explained our side, about how we were being good Samaritans, four knights in shining armor, much like the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (which ironically enough, there were four of them as well). We retold our tale of what we saw and how we felt it was our obligation to interfere. The woman meanwhile, who we later find out had several run-ins with the law over this same man raising his hand to her, lied and told the police that the two of them were having a disagreement that was getting very vocal but not physical at all. She spun her lie that the four of us, in a drunken craze, attacked her boyfriend from the darkness and he was merely protecting himself and her.

Fortunately the cops weren't buying what she was selling and after a closer inspection on her throat, they arrested the boyfriend for domestic violence (probably not the first time) and put him in the back of the car. As they were preparing to leave, one of the cops approached the four of us and commended us for our actions. Sometimes, the duties and responsibilities of being a police officer means you have to bite your tongue and hold your calm despite the apparent wrong happening before your face. Though he advised us to leave the mediating to the professionals, he agreed that sometimes you never know if the police are going to arrive in time to save the day and that's when everyday citizens have to do extraordinary things. So, with that verbal pat on the back, he climbed back into his squad car and drove away, leaving us to walk back to James' house, each talking over one another about our recollection of what had just happened.

Is It Eventually Yet?

"Your total is \$7.68," I just stare at the box of condoms, "Miss, your total is \$7.68. Your holding up the line."

I look stunned at the cashier, retrieve the money from my wallet and tell her to keep the change.

Did Kacie ever buy condoms? She couldn't have, she was only twelve.

It is April 22, 2006. I am leaving a friend's house to get ready for work. Radio is up, windows are down, hair is flying. I press on the pedal a little more to really feel the breeze, when...

Rushing out to my car I hear the car horns, but I don't dare to look. Is it them, the family? Do they know that I'm in town? I open the door to my car just enough to slide inside. Once in, I put my seatbelt on, start the car, and breathe.

I'm gasping for breath, I push my way out of my car. People are running, but not to me. They run past me. I turn to look, to see.

As I put my car into drive I look around, very cautiously. *Not too fast* I tell myself, *just enough to get to where I need to go.* I pull out of Wal-Mart and onto the highway. *Just get to his house safe and sound. Everything will be ok.*

She is lying on the highway, her father is looking over her. There is so much blood, you cant tell where it is coming from. There are three four-wheelers on the highway-two are mangled. Her sister is running inside the house. She is screaming, "Towels!" Her mother is in the ditch. Her uncle is running past me, her grandmother is yelling at me to get off the road. She tells me it will be ok, not believing it herself. I fall.

I pull into the driveway where David meets me. I turn the car off, slide the seatbelt over, and breathe deeply. He asks if I'm alright.

I look at him and simply reply, "Another one of those days." He understands and says no more.

I'm awake in the hospital, the same hospital. Everyone keeps telling me it's going to be fine. Going to be, as in eventually, but not right now. I can tell by their faces: Kacie is dead.

Once inside David's house, we settle down to watch some TV. I place the condoms inside his dresser and wonder when we will need to buy more. I go back to the couch and snuggle up to him. He turns on the TV and starts flipping through

the channels, stopping on the movie *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* and then it hits me: she will never marry.

I don't finish out the school year. Only a month left anyway. I have court on the first day of school, my junior year. There I am sentenced two years probation, one year with out my license, and 100 hours of community service in the ER. They read to me a letter sent from the mother. Blaming me, hating me, despising me.

David changes the channel again. This time he stops at "Gilmore Girls."

I wonder what her favorite show was. What about sports? Was she in any of those? I hold David even closer.

At school, people stare at me. I killed their cousin, friend, childhood playmate. One girl tells me that I should be in jail for what I did. For what I did. She says it as if to imply that what I did was done on purpose. No one stops to think that it was illegal for her to be on that four-wheeler in the first place. She had no helmet and was driving it by herself on a highway. But am I mad at this fact? No. I'm guilty. They are right.

I drift into a sleep next to David. I can feel his body next to mine. Feel his hand gently playing with my hair.

Did Kacie ever have this? Did she know what this was?

I have many sleepless nights. Nights of terror. Dreams of terror. I considered suicide - had the razor to my wrist when I realized it wasn't the answer. I don't want to end on this note. I don't want this to be the way my life has to end. I get up from the floor, look at myself in the mirror, and say the words, "I'm sorry," not only to Kacie, the little girl of 12 whose life ended too soon, but also to myself.

I wake up to David softly touching my face. He whispers the words, "Its going to be alright."

I look at him, with tearful eyes and say, "Yes, it is. Eventually."

Cracks in the Textual Pavement: Possibility in *A Small Place*

Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place* is a short but confrontational representation of the postcolonial state of Antigua. Written as a travel narrative, Kincaid guides the reader through a textual "encounter" with this small island, and reveals through a confrontational rhetorical strategy, the oppressive conditions that the tourist would inevitably miss on their decadent "holiday" in paradise. Throughout her "textual tour," she demystifies the relationship between the tourists and "native" Antiguan, illustrating the way in which this relationship continues the legacy of colonialism, and sustains the material and social conditions of the island. She does this by discussing the interdependent dialectical relationship of the master and slave, revealing the way the Antiguan complacently remain in their role as "slaves" by seeing themselves through the eyes of their masters (tourists and the postcolonial Antiguan government,) and how the gaze of the tourist powerfully perpetuates these conditions. Through historicizing the way in which the subject positions of the tourist and the Antiguan are created, and through her use of an unconventional second person narrative strategy, she situates the reader in such a way that creates a meta-awareness of the constructedness of these subject positions. Once she does this, however, she does not articulate a third position, or call for specific action, but instead leaves the reader with an opening to invent new possibilities. I will examine the way Kincaid's rhetorical strategy and use of language in *A Small Place* creates a space, through this meta-awareness, where the possibility for imagining alternative constructions becomes present.

Kincaid provides a "tour" of the oppressive material and social conditions of Antigua in order to reveal the material effects of the relationship between tourists and Antiguan. Antigua is a tiny island, nine miles wide by twelve miles long, and is hugged by the Caribbean Sea on one side and the Atlantic Ocean on the other. Like most Caribbean islands, Antigua is dependent on tourism as its primary source of income (I counted up to thirteen resorts on this tiny island). Many would argue that tourism provides jobs and a steady Gross Domestic Product (Stronza 3). In fact, for Antigua, tourism occupies 60% of the GDP and 40% of all national investments (CIA factsheet). One of the many "reasons" Antigua depends so heavily on tourism is because agricultural business (there is no oil) is basically non-existent due to water shortages. Of course, during colonial times, sugar plantations were

rampant. To keep up with the international sweet tooth, more and more trees were cut down and land was cleared for planting more crops. This inevitably led to runoff and erosion, making available land scarce (CIA factsheet). Kincaid speaks of her drought-ridden country in an interview with Moira Ferguson:

It's this tiny island surrounded by two vast bodies of water, an ocean and a sea. At the same time we suffered constantly from drought. We could see water, but it was of no use to us. . . . you can't turn anywhere that you don't see this water, but you can't use it. It's like a kind of torment. It is a kind of hell. You would have to ration water, you would have to go to the public pipes at six o'clock every morning, and you would line up for water. (5)

Being surrounded by water that is unattainable is somewhat like being surrounded by wealth that is unattainable, like being surrounded by resorts with high walls and private, closed-off beaches on one's own island home.

The tourist industry in Antigua, while it may provide jobs for some local Antiguan, does not serve to better public conditions. It is a deterrent, especially when the government uses the overall earnings for its own selfish benefit. The public facilities (for the Antiguan), according to Kincaid, are abysmal, reflecting the corrupt government's disregard for the public's welfare and its favoring of transnational investment.

The banks are encouraged by the government to make loans available for cars, but loans for houses not so easily available; and if you again ask why, you will be told that the two main car dealerships in Antigua are owned in part or outright by ministers in government. (7)

The government profits off the "Japanese-made" cars that the taxi drivers use to haul the tourists around, and from the casinos the Antiguan are not allowed to gamble in. Kincaid writes, "Some casinos in the hotels are controlled by mobsters in the United States. They pay somebody in the government who allows them to operate" (60). Someone benefits, but the people of Antigua "cannot see in what way, except for the seasonal employment it offers a few people" (60).

On a nine-by-twelve mile-long island, there are lots of nice "Japanese-made" cars for taxi drivers and plenty of hotels and casinos. Clearly the intentions of the government are elsewhere while public services are left to rot. Kincaid discusses the state of three of the most important public services in a healthy and thriving community: the hospital, the library, and the school. These three institutions are

symbolic of health, knowledge, and literacy. The hospital is so run down and dirty that even if it were stocked with high quality doctors and nurses, “a person from another part of the world—Europe or North America—would not feel confident leaving a domestic pet there” (65). According to Kincaid, however, the doctors are terrible and none of the Antiguan trust them (8). The school is in such terrible condition, that on first glance, it might pass as “some latrines,” and the library that was damaged in 1974 still hasn’t been repaired. Kincaid writes a considerable amount on the state of the library, “that is, as synecdoche for language and knowledge, thought and enlightenment” (Gregg 926). How ironic:

The place where the library is now, above the dry goods store, in the old run-down concrete building, is too small to hold all the books from the old building, and so most of the books instead of being on their nice shelves, resting comfortably, awaiting to acquaint me with all your greatness, are in cardboard boxes in a room, gathering mildew, or dust, or ruin. (43).

The power, language, and stories that created the subject positions of the Antiguan, the books that, as she says, “distorted or erased my history and glorified your own” now sit in a heap of boxes (36).

Kincaid describes the material and social conditions of the island in such a way as to refuse the reader a way to separate themselves from these conditions. Through writing in the second person, she situates the reader in a way that forces them to perform the subject position of “master- tourist.” She writes, “You will forget your part in the whole set up, that bureaucracy is one of your inventions, that Gross National Product is one of your inventions, and all the laws that you know mysteriously favor you” (36). Again, this text is written as a travel narrative, and Kincaid begins the book by directly confronting the reader as the tourist. She writes, “If you go to Antigua as a tourist, this is what you will see. . . . you are a tourist. . . you are on your holiday” (3). These accounts of the state of Antigua are unveiled to the tourist-reader as blind-spots he or she didn’t know they had. She speaks to the tourists as if they had all kinds of fanciful notions about paradise in their imagination. Through her painful and confrontational tour, she is going to pull them (us) into their bodies (a place they’ve neglected for the sake of imagination), a place they would rather not look, let alone see themselves in, and all the damage they (we) have done. She explicitly speaks to the places the tourists’ starry eyes will pass over in a narcissistic, hypnotic gaze:

Oh, What beauty! You have never seen anything like this. You are

so excited. . . . You breathe shallow. You breathe deep. . . . Still standing, looking out the window, you see yourself lying on the beach, enjoying the amazing sun . . . a sun that is your personal friend . . . you see yourself taking a walk on the beach, you see yourself meeting new people (only they are new in a very limited way, for they are people just like you) . . . you see yourself eating some delicious, locally grown food. You see yourself, you see yourself. (13)

Many people claim to travel outside their “home” countries to experience another culture, but according to Kincaid, the people who travel to Antigua are only interested in encountering one thing, themselves, perhaps themselves with an exotic face.

Kincaid easily recognizes this narcissistic impulse. It is part of who “we” are as “tourists,” and more so, as people from “North America (or worse, Europe).” She has been exposed to this type of narcissism since she was young. In “On Seeing England for the First Time,” Kincaid speaks of growing up in colonial schools and how this effected the construction of her identity:

We understood then—we were meant to understand then—that England was to be our source of myth and the source from which we got our sense of reality, our sense of what was meaningful, and our sense of what was meaningless—and much about our own lives and much about the very idea of us headed that last list. (Kincaid 33)

Of course, it didn’t start with her education. It started when the British arrived on the island. The British believed that it was empty space up for grabs. Clearly none of them (British) thought of this island as a place, a dwelling already inscribed with significance by somebody. There are traces. Even if they did, the British were effective in stripping away all those preceding significations (at least the weight/validity of them), and re-inscribing new ones according to the convenience of the colonial and imperial administration (Buell 64). In this process, and the processes that followed, Kincaid’s and other Antiguan’s histories were erased and replaced with a new, dominant story in which they were just a passing footnote, designated to the margins (Kincaid 6).

Kincaid clearly knows that when a tourist encounters the poverty, drought, and corruption, they will inevitably turn it into a source of pleasure for themselves. The drought is fabulous, who wants rain during a vacation? The bad roads are thrilling, “you say, ‘Oh what a marvelous change these bad roads are from the splendid highways I am used to in North America (or, worse, Europe)’” (5). The

tourist will admire the poverty and attach to it their own significance, just like the colonists did. They will see the “Natives” as beautifully unionized with nature.

And you look at the things they can do with a piece of ordinary cloth, the things they fashion out of cheap, vulgarly colored (to you) twine, the way they squat down over a hole they have made in the ground, the hole itself is something to marvel at, and since you are being an ugly person this ugly but joyful thought will swell inside you. (16-17)

Even though the tourist will unavoidably come into contact with something that cannot be explained away as exotic and beautiful so easily, Kincaid candidly reminds us, “you needn’t let that slightly funny feeling you have from time to time about exploitation, oppression, domination develop into full-fledged unease, discomfort; you could ruin your holiday” (10).

The narrator’s use of a second person narrative strategy is quite strong, personal, and a bit jarring, and to be honest, could even be a bit uncomfortable for the reader. I don’t believe that it is her anger that is so difficult to face. She has every right to be angry. Instead, it is the way, through her use of personal language, that she situates the reader in a way that forces them to perform the subject position of Master. It is stifling and cramped, and for the reader, it is difficult to see oneself as a Master, Colonist, and “Ugly human being.” Perhaps this stifled and frozen position is similar to the way Kincaid felt growing up in Antigua, seeing the world first and foremost through the “eyes” of “England,” being defined by a standard of “excellence” in which she wasn’t even included in the definition.

If now as I speak of all this I give the impression of someone on the outside looking in, nose pressed up against a glass window, that is wrong. My nose was pressed up against a glass window alright, but there was an iron vise at the back of my neck forcing my head to stay in place. To avert my gaze was to fall back into something from which I had been rescued, a hole filled with nothing, and that was the word for everything about me, nothing. (36)

Just as she was forced to see “herself” in a certain way, she is effective in creating this effect in *A Small Place*.

The “place” in which the reader and the Antiguan are situated in this text, and the way language is used to designate meaning and signification, exaggerates and exploits the very subject positions she is quarreling with. This strategy lends itself to a demystification of the conditions that give rise to these subject positions,

as the reader experiences first-hand the way language permeates this performative function. Kincaid's own position as narrator is nebulous, and complicates these effects. She slips from one position to the other, speaking for and as one of the Antiguans, but also keeps a critical distance. One third of the way through the book, Kincaid reveals that she no longer lives in Antigua. She writes, "The Antigua that I knew, the Antigua in which I grew up, is not the Antigua you, a tourist would see now. That Antigua no longer exists" (20). She left Antigua when she was seventeen and didn't return for twenty years. She was actually banned from the island in 1985 after returning for a brief visit. This was about the time she wrote this text (Ferguson 2). Because she writes from a place of distance from the Antiguans, in the sense that she is an expatriate, she creates a space in which she can speak as a tourist as well as an Antiguan.

The critical distance of the narrator allows her to contextualize her position as an Antiguan as part of a larger gestalt. In this way she separates her "self" from her view of who the Antiguans are, while still claiming a voice from "inside" that position. She writes, "For we Antiguans, for I am one, have a great sense of things, and the more meaningful the thing, the more meaningless we make it" (8). While in this passage she assumes the identity of an Antiguan, and never really ignores where she comes from, she allows her voice (authorial that is), to slip around, thus making it difficult to pin her down in any one place. This technique lends itself to a destabilization of meaning, of a center, and opens up what was once perceived as a closed system, through the contradictions which, on further inspection, are contradictions that arise through language itself.

An example of a contradiction that arises through this strategy is when she uses personal language to address the reader-tourist in a way that situates them as perpetrators of slavery and colonialism. She writes, "You came. You took things that were not yours." She validates this claim by identifying with the Antiguans, "To the people of a small place, the division of Time, into Past, the Present, and the Future does not exist" (54). However, she contradicts this statement in the same paragraph by speaking about the Antiguans as "them."

No action in the present is an action viewed with its effect on the future. When the future, bearing its own events, arrives, its ancestry is traced in a trancelike retrospect, at the end of which, their mouths and eyes wide open with their astonishment, the people of a small place reveal themselves to be like children being shown the secrets of a magic trick. (54)

Kincaid's position offends some people. Jane King, an author from the Caribbean writes back to Kincaid. She writes, "*A Small Place* begins with Kincaid placing herself in the unique position able to understand the tourist and the Antiguan and despise both while identifying with neither" (King 895). King goes on to say, "But I do not see why Caribbean people should admire her for denigrating our small place in this destructive angry fashion" (899). For some people, Kincaid's style may provoke uncomfortable and defensive feelings and thoughts. It is very difficult to be "placed" in such a narrow, frozen subject position. However, through exaggerating these positions, Kincaid reveals the way in which they are constructed and the impact this has on the material conditions of the island.

In *A Small Place*, there are two distinct subject positions or identities. The tourist, reader, the present day government, and the British colonial administration fall into the position of "Master" and the native Antiguan plunge headfirst into the position of "Slave." Kincaid demonstrates the way in which this dichotomy is sustained through her ironic discussion of the celebration of the Hotel Training School, "a school that teaches Antiguan how to be good servants, how to be a good nobody, which is what a servant is" (55). The graduation ceremonies are broadcast on both television and radio. As slaves the Antiguan do not recognize the way in which their situation is constructed, ". . . people cannot see a relationship between their obsession with slavery and emancipation and the fact that they are governed by corrupt men, or that these corrupt men have given their country away to corrupt foreigners" (55). The Antiguan's position as slaves has been naturalized, thus they cannot see the history of the "present." She writes, "In Antigua people speak of slavery as if it had been a pageant full of large ships sailing on blue water, the large ships filled up with human cargo. . . Then they speak of emancipation itself as if it happened just the other day" (54-55). The Antiguan believe, according to Kincaid, that slavery ended with emancipation 150 years ago.

The Master and Slave are stuck in a situation in which each depends on the representation of the other to survive. This interaction is of course not only applicable to Antiguan and tourists, according to Trinh T. Minh-ha, the story began long ago.

One can date it back to the immemorial days when a group of mighty men attributed to itself a central, dominating position vis-à-vis other groups; overvalued its particularities and achievements; adopted a projective attitude toward those it classified among the out-groups; wrapped itself up in its own thinking, interpreting the

out-group through the in-group mode of reasoning while claiming to speak the minds of both the in-group and the out-group. (Minh-ha 1)

In order for the tourist to see exotic Antigua, to feel inspired by the "simple-ness" of these people, to "find themselves" on their vacation, they must have an other to see themselves through. Similarly, the Antiguan see themselves through the eyes of the tourist. Kincaid writes, "as if having observed the event of tourism, they have absorbed it so completely that they have made the degradation and humiliation of their daily lives into their own tourist attraction" (69).

Through her narrative strategy, Kincaid turns the tourist-readers' gaze around, thus revealing the constructedness of their (our) position as well as the position of the Antiguan. This interdependent relationship is necessary to keep these subject positions frozen. These identities are not "real," they are textual. Of course, there are all kinds of material and social consequences when one's behavior centers around a central storyline. But that storyline is made of signifiers, and those signifiers depend on other signifiers and so on indefinitely. There is no slave-ness or master-ness. There is no center. These positions are created through language, through the sign.

Kincaid exploits difference by designating rigid identities, and this allows difference in language to open up. The reader is a tourist. The reader is always a tourist. Kincaid prescribes meaning to the tourist-reader in a way that capitalizes on the illusion of presence in language. She talks directly to the reader and tells them, "you are a tourist . . . you say . . . you feel . . . you see . . ." Using language in this way signifies a closure between what is said and the presence of meaning. However, Kincaid does this in such a way that allows a space to emerge where a meta-awareness of these constructions comes forth. She writes:

Antigua is too beautiful. Sometimes the beauty of it seems unreal. Sometimes the beauty of it seems as if it were a stage set for a play. . . . no real day could be that sort of sunny and bright, making everything seem transparent and shallow; and no real night could be that sort of black, making everything seem thick and deep and bottomless. No real day and no real night could be that evenly divided . . . it is as if the open lid of a box you are inside suddenly snaps into place . . . it is as if, then, the beauty . . . were a prison, and as if everything and everybody inside it were locked in and everything and everybody that is not inside it were locked out. (78-79)

It is difficult to give words to what emerges because it is really a sense of nothing, of emptiness. Signifiers are always deferring meaning, and there can never be an encounter with the “radical other” (Derrida xliii). There can never be an encounter with the signified. Power is bound up in representation and explanation, and this causes the unequal exchange between human beings. Identity is textual. Knowledge is textual. In the preface to Jacques Derrida’s *Of Grammatology*, Gayatri Spivak writes, “The structure of ‘presence’ is thus constituted by difference and deferment. But . . . the ‘subject’ that ‘perceives’ presence is also constituted similarly” (Derrida xliii).

As Kincaid reveals the historical conditions and power relations that make up and sustain the subject positions of master and slave, tourist and Antiguan, she creates a possibility for the reader to imagine alternative constructions. These abstract identities have been demystified and this leaves the reader with an opening, a space of meta-awareness. She does not articulate a third position, but instead leaves it open. She effectively removes the past out of the future and what is left is a space to act without the old story. In the last lines of her text she writes:

Of course, the whole thing is, once you cease to be a master,
once you throw off your master’s yoke, you are no longer human
rubbish, you are just a human being and all the things that adds up
to. So, too, with slaves. Once they are no longer slaves, once they
are free, they are no longer noble and exalted; they are just human
beings. (81)

By not articulating a specific call to action or constructing a new subject position, she is consistent with her narrative strategy. Once she utters a third position, she would effectively continue the dialectical relationship. Trinh T. Minh-ha discusses the way language is always already othering. She writes, “You can no doubt capture, tame, and appropriate it to yourself, for language as a form of knowing will always provide you with your other” (45). By leaving this space open, the reader is left with a certain responsibility that would engage them in a way that would reveal their own agency in imaging different alternatives.

In conclusion, Jamaica Kincaid’s *A Small Place* is a powerful postcolonial polemic on the state of Antigua. Through her guided “textual tour” of Antigua she argues that tourism continues the legacy of colonialism. Through her use of an unconventional second person narrative strategy she reveals the way in which the subject positions of the Antiguan and the tourists are constructed and sustained. She illustrates the way in which these positions uphold the oppressive social

and material conditions of the island. By demystifying and providing the historical context of the relationship of tourist and Antiguan, master and slave, she leaves the reader with a met-awareness of the constructedness of these subject positions. Through this awareness a space becomes present for imagining alternative constructions, and it is within this space that agency emerges. Of course, we are left with the question of the relationship between language and material and social conditions. It is clear that there is no access to a world outside of language, so it is through re-articulations like Kincaid's text, that agency and the opportunity for transformation in this world becomes possible.

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The Horror...The Horror

There are many aspects that go into writing a worthwhile story. By encompassing all aspects such as plot, setting, and character, a story allows itself to be spun in the author's imagination, stretched across paper, and forever imprinted in the minds of the readers that pick it up. Whether it is hot off the press or discovered amongst a dusty bookshelf, a story relates itself to a reader based on the inner knowledge that all of us, as humans, possess. By drawing on our already existing ideas of love we can identify with a romance novel, by teasing our sense of danger we can find ourselves lost in the grasp of an adventure novel, and by exploring the darker, more sinister sides of humanity we can lose ourselves in the chilling grips of the horror novel. The horror novel is unique in the fact that it purposely uses the unknown and mysterious in order to define itself as a rational and concrete work of fiction.

I will begin to unpack the genre by first identifying the individual puzzle pieces that fit together to form the overall, bone chilling entity that is horror. The genre still follows closely to many long established means of telling a good story and its elements are woven within the spider webs and shadows of its story. To begin, with we will first examine the settings. Settings can be some of the most important aspects that begin the framework for what we consider to be a horror novel. I will first use an example from Edgar Allen Poe's, *Fall of the House of Usher*:

The room in which I found myself was very large and lofty. The windows were long, narrow, and pointed, and at so vast a distance from the black oaken floor as to be altogether inaccessible from within. Feeble gleams of encrimsoned light made their way through the trellised panes, and served to render sufficiently distinct the more prominent objects around the eye, however, struggled in vain to reach the remoter angles of the chamber, or the recesses of the vaulted and fretted ceiling. Dark draperies hung upon the walls. The general furniture was profuse, comfortless, antique, and tattered. Many books and musical instruments lay scattered about, but failed to give any vitality to the scene. I felt that I breathed an atmosphere of sorrow. An air of stern, deep, and irredeemable gloom hung over and pervaded all. (212)

The first thing that the reader must take in by this description is the sheer size of the room. Words such as "large and lofty," "so vast a difference," and "recesses of the vaulted and fretted ceiling" give the reader a sense of something greater than themselves. It also opens the text up to be received in such a large and elusive manner. This is relative to the perception of the text as it leaves the reader mentally looking over their shoulders because not all things are revealed to them at once. The passage also adds the shades of light and dark to the story. We are comforted little by the "feeble gleams of encrimsoned light" and find ourselves surrounded by black, oaken floors and dark drapes that provide no warmth or security within their presence. These dark, expansive settings signify all the alerts in our brains to "caution," "danger," "stay alert" and thus from the onset we are constantly on guard and both eager and wary to explore deeper into the text. Another important sign to take away from this quick snap shot is the atmosphere that is presented by the discarded instruments, the tattered furniture, and the fretted ceiling. They all combine together to signify the crushing gloom and apprehension of the room. As we place this isolation into a wider sense of our knowledge of the world, we know that something sinister awaits us in the darker recesses of the house; and yet despite our best efforts we are drawn deeper into awaiting horror.

Character is another essential part of any story and the horror novel is no exception. It is often stated that if an author can create an enrapturing and ambivalent enough character, then everything else (i.e. plot, setting, narrative) is secondary. Nowhere else is this seen more than in horror. It is the character of both the monster and the hero or, in some cases, the monstrous hero, that ultimately captures our imaginations and our fears. A perfect example for this is the reoccurring presence of one of Stephen King's most terrifying characters: Randall Flagg. Flagg has appeared in many of King's stories, most notably *The Stand* and *the Dark Tower* saga. He is described thus:

He looks like anybody you see on the street. But when he grins, birds fall dead off telephone lines. When he looks at you a certain way, your prostate goes bad and your urine burns. The grass yellows up and dies where he spits. He's always outside. He came out of time. He doesn't know himself. He has the name of a thousand demons. Jesus knocked him into a herd of pigs once. His name is Legion. He's afraid of us. We're inside. He knows magic. He can call the wolves and live in the crows. He's the king of nowhere.

But he's afraid of us. He's afraid of... inside. (103)

This paragraph is loaded to the brink with signs of evil and foreboding. The images of birds falling dead, grass turning yellow and dying instantaneously, and the calling to wolves and crows (which are typically seen as creatures of evil or darkness) all signify something dark and menacing within our minds. Most Westerners would automatically assume something devilish. The paragraph allows this cultural assumption and then reinforces it by capitalizing the name Legion, surrounding him with the company of demons, and finally pitting Flagg directly against Jesus. The significant character trait in Flagg is his mastery of the unknown. Even when reading a paragraph that tries to define him in concrete terms, he is still an elusive shimmer, a shadow off to the side. This is an important concept that thrives in the darkness of the horror genre. Though you can see, hear, or even smell the danger and demon around you, it is constantly held just outside the reach of your hands and your mind. Your brain is always just about to grasp it and then it is snatched from the light of discovery and coiled back in the inky recesses of a reader's imagination, waiting again for a moment to strike and surprise.

This is essentially the heart of the horror novel. It seeks not only to impress a sensation of terror and anxiety but also to challenge what is universally known as right and rational in our world. By blending our inborn ideas of the supernatural, the grotesque, and the mysterious, the horror novel seeks to use ordinary people in ordinary situations in which we would almost find ourselves. Then with the clever introduction of suspense and the use of signs such as rot, decay, ominous lighting, and dread, it takes us down not so ordinary paths into not so ordinary scenarios. It is important to realize that almost all the aspects of the horror novel, when seen in isolation, are usually just conventional, non-threatening places and items that are imbued with a sense of fear or revulsion that lend themselves to our own inner fears. A clown with a balloon, an abandoned home, a doll with a blank stare – when all these things are seen alone there is nothing abominable or even scary about them at all. Yet, when you start to dim the lights around them and move them to the peripheral of your brain, the hermeneutic code takes hold of the sign and imbues it with not only a sense of mystery or caution, but also an almost magnetic draw to the reader and the horror. We are drawn to it, almost compelled by its power, to seek it out (despite the danger we know it possesses) and to appease ourselves with the uncovering of the mummy's wraps or the drawing back of the coffin lid.

Whether we read it for the goose bumps it causes to creep up our arms

or because we are just drawn to the enigma of the unknown, horror provides a mythology that is set upon the many arbitrary objects that constantly litter our world and shape our lives. By turning these signs slightly away from their boring, day-to-day positions and moving them slightly into the shadows, we open a new view of the world and its dangers that await us just around the corner. Perhaps the scariest part of horror is when the long established traditions of innocence and goodness are blurred to the point that their binary oppositions overtake them and they create an unfathomable creature that our brains just cannot accept without revulsion or fear. These binaries, such as demon children or killer toys, reflect a world to which we do not and cannot relate towards and, therefore, become alien to us and our first instinct is again, “danger” or “caution”. This is the defining moment for horror, it combines the words that trigger a physical response in our bodies and constructs them into a certain, knowable mythology that dares us to keep coming back for more.

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VISUAL ARTS



Geese



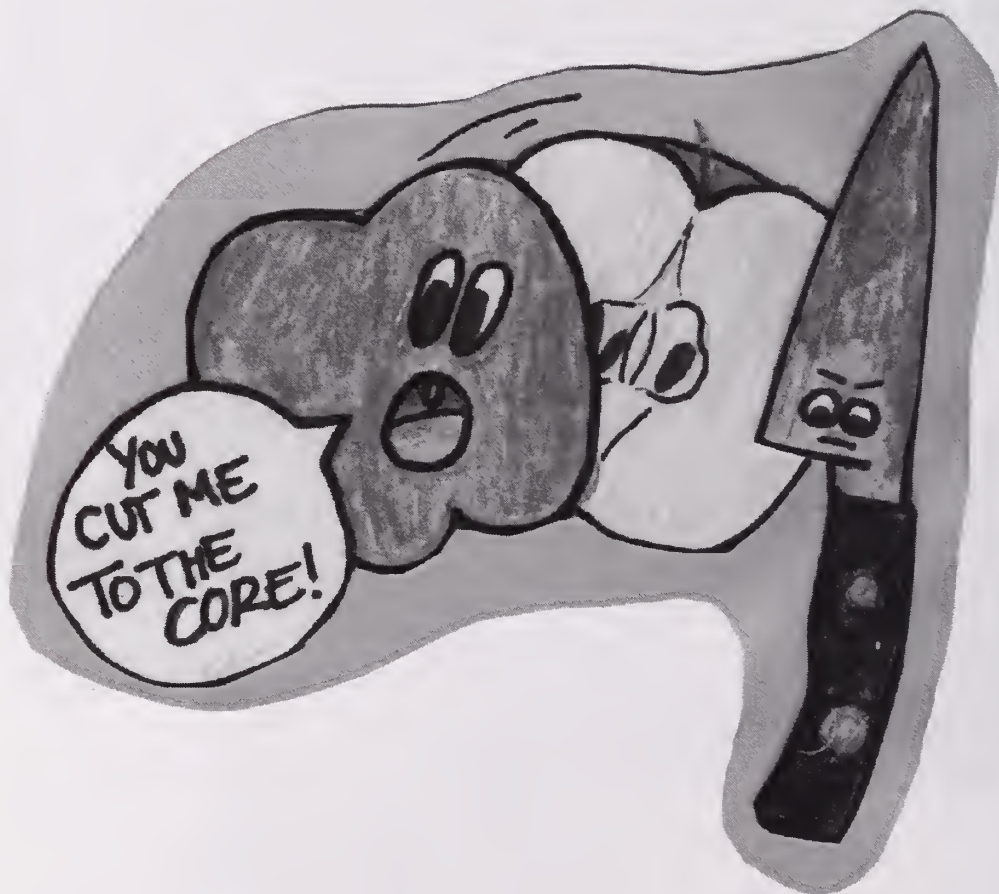
Utensil Tension

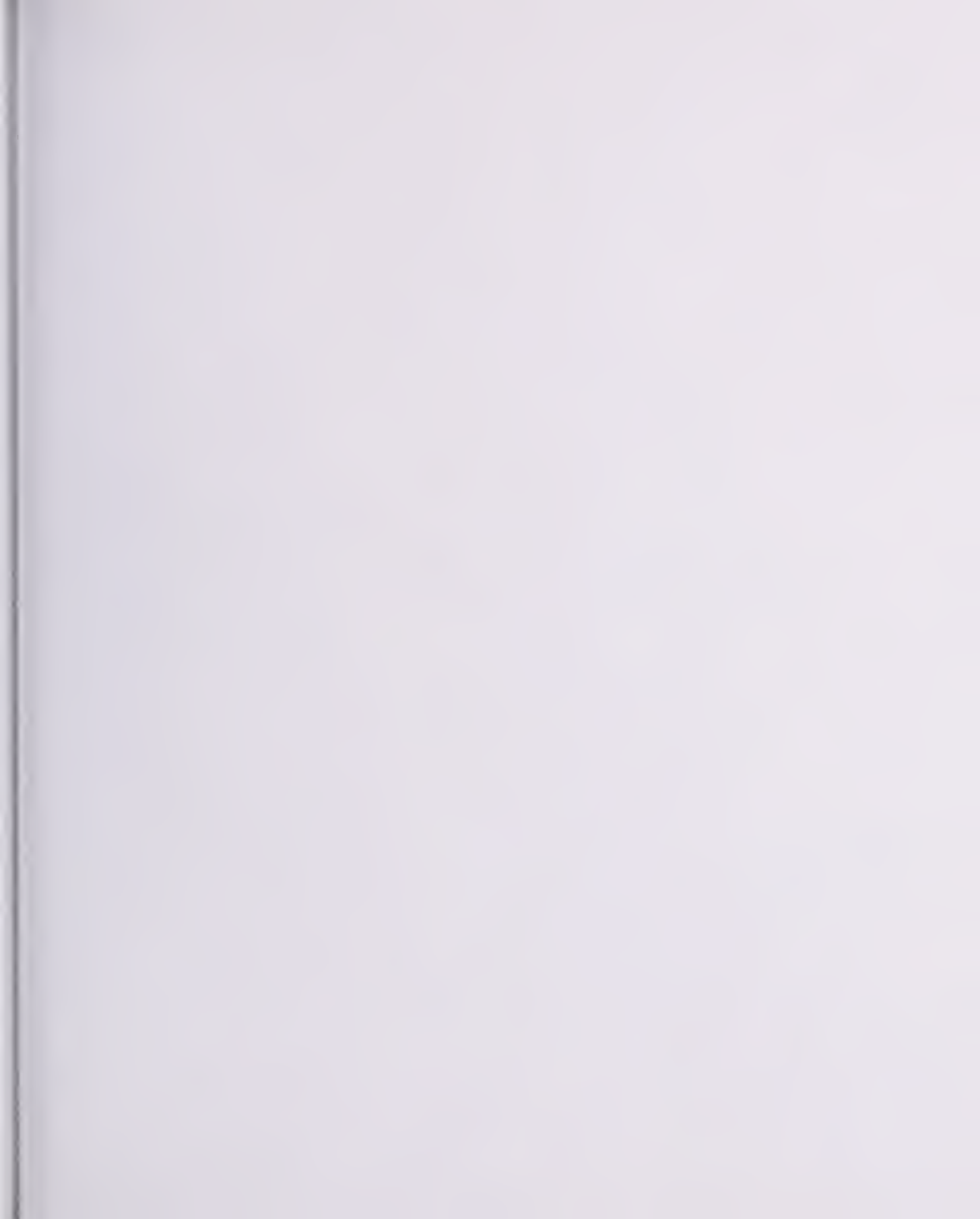


Puppeteer



Apple Slice





HELP

ME

PLAY



Manna Culture

Scene: Two males, A & B, seated at a table. Each is num-numming, having just savored fresh bee pollen from B's backyard hives, from a jar on the table. They could be brothers, cousins, neighbors; B is somewhat older and more educated. Both are dressed casually.

A: I sure am proud to be here.

B: Why's that?

A: Sixty days, man. I been straight for two months solid.

B: That is indeed a milestone. I congratulate you, sir. [Shake A's hands.] Has it been a blessing?

A: It sure has. It's like my mind has opened up for the first time. I'm seeing things that have always been there for me to see, but I just never noticed.

B: Like what?

A: Like, well like things...things aren't always what I always thought they were, like, say how shoelaces actually work better than velcro, you know? [Points at new running shoes.]

B: Yeah? Kudos then. [They high five.] Keep up the fast footwork! Strengthen your heart first, and the rest of your body will follow. So, what are the odds - it so happens today is special for me too, and the missus. Today is my—our—eleventh wedding anniversary.

A: Well, well, the ol' one one, huh?

B: You are correct, sir. She's been the only one too, in all that time. The only one that matters. [Smiles.]

A: Man, that is some *awesome* bee pollen. Usually it's so bland, what I get from the store. This stuff is so...wild! I mean you can almost taste the individual different flowers.

B: Yeah, you can't fake that shit. That's true taste. But you know, it's the sweet little bees that do all the work. Big white things look like file cabinets out back

is where they make their gold. Whenever I run low, I just step out and pull down their drawers and get me a little, know what I mean?

A: [Chortles.] I surely do know what you mean.

B: That stuff you get in the store, that's from bees rented out to pollinate a single crop, like oranges. That's why it tastes all the same. My bees fly to all the different flowers on all the land all around. Some probably go to Florida and back, hell if I know.

A: So that's why it tastes so wild?

B: You got it bro. The bee pollen you buy in the store is a metaphor for our culture, know that?

A: Metaphor?

B: Yeah. Old English word I learned once from an Indian cowboy—came all the way from Pramanyana, India. Used to hang with him in my rodeo days—called himself The Brahma Brahmin.' Hell of a good rider, always in the upper caste. Anyway, 'metaphor' means like a symbol, you know?

A: Uh...symbol, you mean like a codeword?

B: Yeah, a symbol, you know. Like in slang, when you say 'She is the bomb.' Or 'I daresay, we're in a bit of a pickle, old chap.' Like the pickle, you know?

A: Ok, I see.

B: Right. So the bland pollen is like our culture, you know? The whole act of pollination is supposed to be wild and promiscuous, like it is in nature, like with my bees. But the pollen from one species only, one where all the individuals are bred like clones—or as clones—to be exactly alike, like oranges or pickles. Well that pollen will be bland because it comes from virtually the same flower, over and over.

A: Wow, sounds like a boring marriage.

B: Exactly! It's called monoculture. One God, one nation, one spouse, one crop, one fast food, one on one, on and on.

A: But, like your marriage, don't you get some kinda unity you can take pride in?

- B: And how you think unity tastes?
- A: Precocious, with sassy undertones of chocolate and rhubarb?
- B: Bland. But not only bland, vulnerable. When we homogenize, we lose the strength of our multiple individualities. Only one God means one monotonous vanilla deity, without all the nuanced character we could get from mythologies of other times and places. Truly one nation would mean no states, like Missouri everywhere, even in New York and California. One wife, one sexlife, oh my God, don't get me started. And one crop, like corn, and one breed of tomato, lettuce, beef, all speed-grown and harvested on vast factory farms, yielding mass tons of poisonous environmental waste, so we can have bad tacos at the Bell, 24/7. We remove ourselves from participating in the competitive diversity of evolution, and we lose the ability to adapt, which is fundamentally the source of our creativity, our wild taste. Meanwhile, our continually evolving natural enemies learn to overcome and outwit our same old unchanging strategies, like guerilla fighters and vandals, tearing down the monolithic empire.
- A: Wow you are blowing my mind with this shit! On the other hand, I want to keep my mind intact. That's what the last two months has been about for me, man.
- B: One reality, the temperate middle path? Indivisible, with liberty and justice to everyone else along the way?
- A: Yeah man, that's what I mean—the clarity of vision to see that way now. With my mind under varieties of influences, I wasted a lot of time, wavering off my true path.
- B: Your single destiny is clear to you now?
- A: I do feel a certainty. A driving singularity of self-projectin'. But with that comes a whole new set of problems. Like a lot of my inalienable rights actually feel alienated by the way I'm supposed to work and drive and be nice.
- B: It's nothing new, grasshopper. Thoreau and others saw it coming with the industrial revolution a couple centuries ago. He called it expediency. The natural, national inclination to convenience. Civilization began around 10,000 years ago in the Fertile Crescent, when, with agriculture, it became convenient for those in power to lock up the food supply and make everyone 'earn' their

living, providing day after day of steady and well-divided labor, instead of simply wandering all over, merely hunting and gathering.

A: Like bees!

B: You got it, cockroach. It used to be you could take care of business and cover your nut by noon, have lunch and a siesta, then play with a different girl at a different watering hole every night if you wanted. And before agriculture and its corollary hierarchies, no doubt women were treated more like queen bees, considered powerful and vital like the earth, because they were obviously the source of fresh fruits. But as men sowed seed where they plowed, it became clear that making babies wasn't entirely female magic, that men and their sacred juice might be leavening the loaves. It began to seem only natural that women should be lying down like the earth and taking whatever men stuck in them from above, raping and reaping. So eventually, with their superior physical strength and love of farm implements, males' dominance soon became the manifest destiny. The rest, as they say, is his-story.

A: Damn, I never thought of it that way! ! It's all...interlockin'! Parts a' one BIG problem! How you know all this? How you know all that really happened?

B: Heard it from the bees, Jeeves. It's in the buzz, cuz.

A: Haw, haw! What the fuck are you saying?

B: I'm saying women should be back on top, man!

A: I am definitely not down with that, dog! Not all of a sudden. Why should either men or women be on top, necessarily?

B: Naw man, I was just shittin' you about that. What I'm really saying is that dominance is a kink.

A: You mean like perv? Like a fetish?

B: That's right. It's a fetish that leads to expedience, to monoculture, to fossilhood.

A: To bland bee pollen? You're sayin' that'll wipe us out.

B: It was a mistake for our species to try to fortify against nature by settling down and cultivating. That's when men began ego inflation, and started blowing all their mono bubbles of dominance, which has by gradual expedients, filled the tub with the cloying bubblebath of monoculture—in everything from society

to crops—in which we torpidly soak our consciousness all the livelong day, with an extra hour added and subtracted every year so we can spring or fall for variety.

- A: So hey, what's your point here dude? We need to hose off and be nice to girls? Or are we supposed to be playin' the field and try pollinatin' girls from other countries more often than the ones next door? I like the girl next door. We have a lot in common, and I could see us sittin' together, old folks naked on the front porch, just watchin' the river go by.
- B: Well I do believe pollination should definitely be an act of mutual consent, whether you're just there to snag a little nectar and your thorax happens to get jiggy, or whether you prefer stamens or pistils or both. I'm saying this whole urge to demarcate and exaggerate, to say this is mine and that's yours, and one should prevail over the other, is what leads ultimately to the folly of monoculture. Humans were made for the earth, not vice versa. The more we fanatically, maniacally try to subdue and convert the earth into human beings only, the more likely will the earth consume and bury us.
- A: I just don't see it. There's problems, but we got to work together to solve what we've been lazy about as individuals, right?
- B: Bland bee pollen is still pollen, right? Got to take the good with the bad? May not be perfect, but this is prolly the best of all possible worlds?
- A: Well shit yeah! I guess. At least potentially.
- B: Naw dog, that ain't the way it is. Every ace from Thoreau to Camus has said it. You got to REVOLT against the absurd. There's no hope of ever dominating it, but your particular struggle against it—or actually your conception of it, since it's really you anyway—defines you, and puts you in your proper place, which is definitely not as boss of anything but your own fate.
- A: So we got to bend, but bend with the wind? Sounds submissive to me.
- B: Just like the bees, son. The power of their unity derives from the diversity of what they bring to the hive, you know? Look, when we first started licking on our pollen pops a few minutes ago, did you ever think you would directly be agreeing to the wholesale rejection of reductionist, testosterone-driven, imperialist civilization?
- A: Well I—no. I did not see that coming. But I am totally willing to be down with

that, if that's what you're asking. Especially if it's wholesale. The one price I like is cheap.

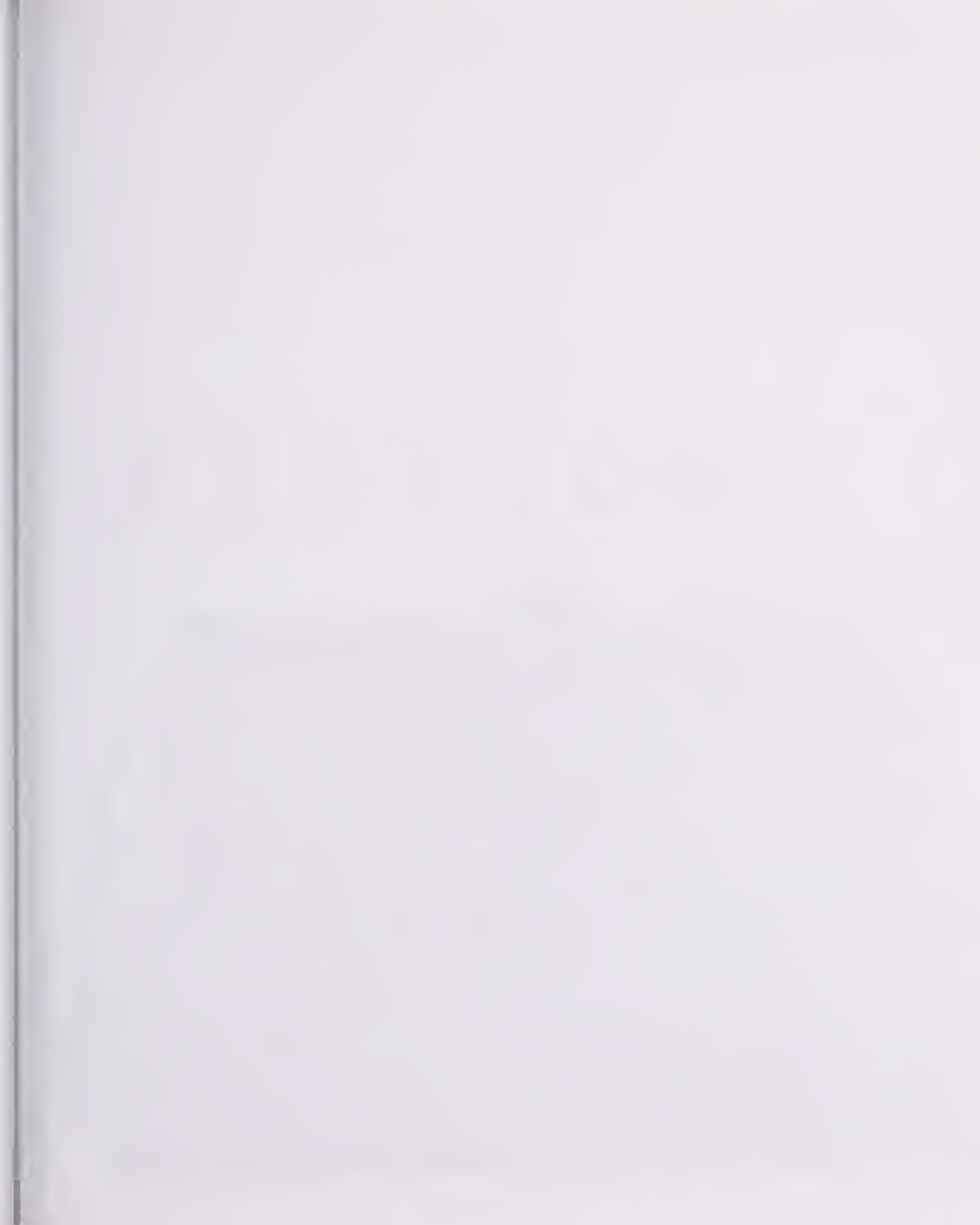
B: Wholesale, but costly. We're stuck in time and space, so it looks like there will always be blood, but that vision is sheerly patriotic. To get anywhere we'll have to stretch out and embrace the absurd, using its overwhelming weight to push against and build strength, before we flame out in rage against the dying of the young virgin silent night, dig?

A: Uh yeah! Dig! Say, how 'bout more a that pollen, please? Stretch out, rage, silent night—gotcha.

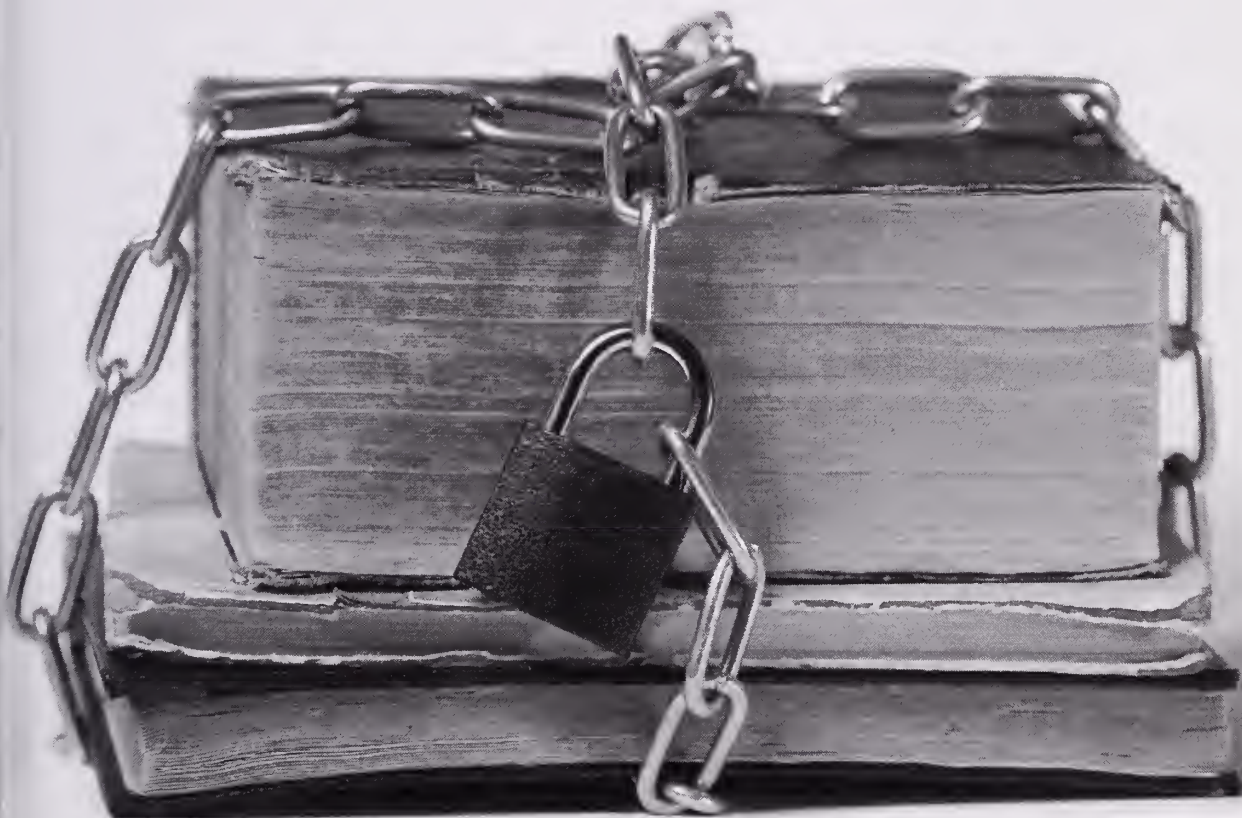
[Both have another taste from the jar with their spoons.]

B: It does make you think, huh.

A: If I was a bee, now I'm sure as hell not sure what kinda bee I'd want to be.



fiction



Captive

The evening that the frigid, harsh wind pulled a snowstorm into the heart of Light Rims, Maine, Rime Molet was riding in the back seat of her mother's Ford pick-up truck. The small town, which was filled with citizens like the Molet family who were usually prepared for the rough Maine winters, had had two blizzards within the last three weeks, each snow spill lasting four or five days at a time. People were holed up in their homes until the snow stopped and roads were cleared. It was the first time in a few weeks that Mrs. Molet dared to get her old truck out on the road, but even then she didn't really want to leave the safety of her home. It was a forced circumstance though—she was stuck with no other choice when they ran out of perishables. Rime watched twilight commence as her mother's truck shoved through the already snow-entrenched road and into the town's only Phillips 66, a place that sat smack dab between the Molet home and the town itself. The place was deserted of customers, leaving the elderly owner to wander aimlessly around the shop, waiting to close up. Rime, her petite fist holding up her head as she leaned against the old passenger window, blew her warm breathe on the frozen glass and stared past the rapidly disappearing conglomerated particles. Kids at school made fun of her for being quiet and looking blank-faced all the time. Rime's eyes, heavily lashed and brilliantly blue with large, dark pupils, lankly caressed every object outside as Mrs. Molet parked her vehicle and turned to the girl. Her child was one handedly holding a pair of dirty purple gloves in her lap, reminding the mother of the day Rime came home a muddy mess after school, holding those purple pieces of fabric. Rime never talked about what happened; she just carried those dirty gloves around with her all the time ever since. They weren't even her own.

"Don't you wanna come in with me?" she asked with a sweet grin, "I'm just gonna pick up a small bag of groceries before this wild snow hits us harder—"

"I don't wanna go in. I'll just wait here," she said, silently kicking the back of the seat.

Her mother sighed. Rime was the eight-year-old that never argued, never even fussed. The mother didn't have a good reason to fight her child, and Rime knew it. Biting the inside of her cheek, her mother thought about the other children who had recently been lost to the wicked snow. Tragic Accidents. But Mrs. Molet's child would sit in the truck, no big deal, as long as nothing peaked her interest,

and the cold wasn't one of those things. Knowing that fact without a doubt, she watched Rime peer out the window at the only other vehicle around – a newly abandoned station wagon.

"I don't blame you. Well, how 'bout I grab you some new coloring books while I'm in there—and do you want some candy or something?" she asked as she placed a white mitt on the door handle.

"Nah, thanks; I just wanna go home. Daddy promised he'd play Clue with me... Will you be in there long? 'Cause sometimes you're in there forever—when it's only a gas station, and I wait here forever sometimes!"

"Well, alrighty then, little miss," Rime's mother chuckled at the child's impatience, "You know, I'll be in a hurry anyways since this storm's on our tails, but don't you get mad at me if Mr. Calavers wants to chit chat with the *one* costumer he sees these days."

The woman grabbed her purse and stepped out of the automobile.

"Rime," Mrs. Molet hollered above the wind, hesitantly, "don't leave this truck, and I mean it," she slammed the door and mouthed, "I'll be right back out."

The woman jogged to the building and pushed her way through the swinging door. Rime watched her mother smile as the owner greeted her merrily, his mouth moving with full words. Rime was easily annoyed by this man and soon grew tired of watching him talk. She unclipped her seat belt and leaned her back against the passenger door. The truck's seats were smooth leather giving way to a body easily and comfortably. Rime languidly drooped across the tan cushion, waiting for the driver to reenter the car and carry her home. She could hear the wind shove the cold as it glided past her door. The light from an overshadowing lamppost, swaying angrily in the billowing snow storm, shown through the window across from the girl. Shadows made by the ever moving light drifted in and out as Rime began stroking the smooth hide beneath her. Her attention was quickly drawn toward the swaying shadows once again when she saw a silhouette pass by the window opposite of her and stop, blocking all light. The girl looked up, expecting to see her parent; instead, she was met with the gaze of a good-looking man. His light, shaggy head still had snowflakes resting on it, and he smiled wide at Rime as he shivered. The dimples in his cheeks were deep and alluring. Rime observed as he opened the truck door and glanced toward the gas station where her mother lingered.

"Hey sweetie! It's cold in here, isn't it? Why don't you get in my car, where it's nice and toasty?" He shrugged toward his little, silver station wagon, abandoned

across the white-sloshed road. The car now threw out exhaust fumes, and she could hear the light sound of a song playing on the radio.

Rime looked at the man dully. *Who does he take me for?*

"Come on, hurry up! You can come keep warm 'til your mom comes back out."

Rime blinked.

"Aw, come on, now! You have to be bored, all alone in here," he licked his lips in a quick way, wetting his chapped skin. The man's brown eyes held something that interested the little girl.

This new found stranger pulled himself further into the truck, his eyes still looking toward the door of the gas station. He was wearing heavy boots, which left snow on the truck floor where he planted them. The man's crusted hands reached for Rime's tiny arm, tugging at her.

"Come on, sweets—" he grabbed her right below the armpit, unconsciously tickling her slightly, and pulled harder when he saw that she had yet to scream. Rime involuntarily smiled and watched him jerk like a curious bird. The feel of the man's heavy grip didn't move her, even when he tugged harder. She finally loosened her hand and dropped the dirt worn gloves onto the floor.

Get out, she thought. *Get out*.

"You better come on now," he gripped her hard, "before you freeze to death."

This time he wrenched Rime out of her seat, twisting her chest away from him and pulling her whole body backwards, cupping her mouth tightly. Rime wilted. The man quickly dragged her out of the car, leaving wide marks where his feet stomped in the fresh snow. Rime watched the snow part and melt where his padding left marks. Normally, she might enjoy the euphoria of snow being disheveled upon a touch, the way all children do. This was different. She was freezing—the man had left her coat in the car—yet the rough fabric of his worn Carhart left goose bumps on top of her already made goose bumps. Holding her tightly, the dimpled man hurriedly hauled her the whole fifty yards to his car. Steam rolled out in billows from the running engine, floating among the deeply flaked air and wind. His voice was low and he breathed heavily, salivating.

"Now, we're just gonna get in my car here, and we're gonna play a game. It'll be fun!"

Rime smirked at the man when he threw open his back seat door and she

was pushed in like a dirty load of laundry. The man slithered into the vehicle and swooshed himself toward her, making sure to shut off the exit.

"The game is simple, ok? It's like cowboys and Indians, right? I'll tie you up, 'cause you're the Indian, and you're going to be very quiet, yuh get it? But if you're not quiet, I'll have to make you be quiet," he said in one long breath, looking at her seriously.

Rime moved away from him and began to reach for the handle of the other passenger door, but her captor stopped her short. The girl turned towards him, blinking and shaking her head. The man looked at her apprehensively. He looked surprised, maybe by the lack of emotion on the girl's face. The others had screamed and cried—she hadn't flinched. Maybe she was shell-shocked. Before he made another move, Rime curiously observed the area around her. The station wagon's floor was covered in a hodgepodge of ropes, duct tape, brown paper bags, hunting magazines, Fruit Loops, lighter fluid containers, and thin leather gloves. The Fruit Loops made her belly growl. Turning eyes on the stranger she leaned against the door, pressing her head against the chilled window, feeling the uneven, frayed fabric beneath her buttocks. The place smelt of iron, gas, and Old Spice. Rime's nostrils flared a little when the man seized the duct tape. He pulled out a long stretch of the silver stickiness, gripped her neck tightly, quickly, and wrapped the tape around her mouth, then her head. Rime's gaze never shifted from his face as the child tried pressing his hands away from her. Heart racing slowly, the victim thought about what he was going to do after he taped and tied her all up. Shaggy hair whipped across her face as the man knelt towards her, still compressing the child's hands behind her back. She felt him rub his gruff face against her neck as he took a deep whiff of her fair hair.

Rime was tired of playing games with this stranger. She felt a slow wet sensation creeping between her legs as she relieved herself, urine seeping through her jeans and onto his leg. The man pulled back and looked down. Rime quickly brought her knees up and into his Solar Plex, landing her tiny bones in the perfect spot, causing him to jerk his full weight off of her. This made the dog-man mad, and he pressed a gruff hand on top of her face and head, shoving her body into a horizontal position beneath him. She struggled to kick him and pry away his fingers from her eyes. The villain pressed his lower half against her as he slipped his hand off her face and down to her shoulder. She stared at the fist he held in the air. He would now punch her, hard, to knock her out—to keep her quiet, according to his

promise. Rime glared as fiercely as hard as she could.

You just couldn't get out, could you? Rime whispered inside.

Her captor stopped mid-punch, as if the cold had suddenly frozen him.

The man blinked rapidly, "What?"

Get off, he heard with not only his ears but his whole body.

Rime threw his stationary hand off of her chest as she raised her torso up and pulled herself towards him. The night air now seemed to encompass the inside of the car, drowning out the slight lights coming from the console and gas station. Music that played in the background from the car radio slipped out of time and space as the stranger's fist unclamped itself and fell. He shook as Rime widened her eyes and an empty, dark look crept from her.

"How in the—what are you doing—what are you!" He yelled into the dense air, unable to unclench the pressure he fearfully felt in his chest.

Nerves uncontrollably grabbed his mind and the guy shoved a hand into his coat pocket, pulling out a small hand gun. He brought the gun up and aimed at Rime.

Huh? You think that will work? She shook her head slowly.

The man tried to pull the trigger, but the gun was shaking so hard in his bulky hand that he lost his grip of it, dropping it into her lap. She picked the weapon up with her index finger and thumb as if it were a loose hair she was shedding from her jeans and tossed it to the floor. Rime's captor immediately flung himself backwards grappling for the door handle. He found it quickly and fell out of the car, crumpling on the white ground outside. The air sood still around him. Like a crab he began scooting in reverse on his backside, using his rough palms to haul his heavy self farther from the station wagon. Rime slinked, crawled, and sloped out of the gross and hollow place.

The girl stepped soundlessly onto the snow, her print folding deep into the ground, wetting the foot of her jeans. He shivered as the child stood solidly before him. Images of his past flew through his mind like hair whipping in the wind. Rime looked at the figure before her, the once hell-bent-evil crushed beneath the weight of a single gaze from her. Calmly, she ripped the tape down from her face, letting it rest in a wadded mass around her neck. She breathed deeply in and out, feeling the gaping hole of evil inside him with her mind. It was written all over his heart—he knew how dangerous the storms could be—the snow is easily blamed for disappearances. Rime tilted her head to the side with a squeamish snapping noise,

a picture of the purple gloves settling into her mind. The man unconsciously sat up, stood up...stared at her.

"It's time for you to go now," she whispered.

But the man couldn't move his feet. Slow realization showed on his face as Rime's eyes grew more vacant and dim. Slowly, her captive's jaw dropped as his eyes opened wide, sending his blonde brows soaring. A black, smoggy substance pooled from his mouth, choking him, enveloping his face, his neck, his chest. He fell to his knees and vehemently vomited the stuff. Rime blinked a few seconds later to see her so-called captor standing before her, this time as a vaguely human-shaped, translucent, black mass.

A strong wind blew, taking parts of the man-made-shadow with it in one long, slow sweep. Rime stepped forward and quietly launched herself through the man's invisible yet corporeal remains as if he was nothing but air. She turned to look where he had stood moments before; he had disappeared with the gust of wind. Following the snow prints he had left behind earlier, she glided across the road and toward the truck. Her mother was at the register, paying for groceries. Rime climbed back into the truck, picking up the purple gloves as she went. Sighing, she rubbed the grimy fabric between her fingers and buckled herself in, laying her head against the window with a 'thump'. Rime closed her eyes and waited for the sounds of her mother's arrival. When they came, the girl studied Mrs. Molet as she opened the truck door and shoved two big bags of items onto the passenger seat.

"Hey, kiddo. Sorry I took so long—that old man could talk 'til kingdom come!" her mother turned to look at her, "I got you some—" the woman gave her daughter a double take, and stared at her neck, brows knitted, "Rime, what is that stuff around your throat?" Rime looked down at her mother's observation, duct tape sticking to her body in crumpled dreads.

Korma Sutra Love Secrets

I had just returned to Kansas City from forty days of serious staged moral testing by Satan in the desert, and though I still felt bound by the mutual chastity vow I'd made with Scarlett Johansson several weeks prior, it seemed almost a morale imperative that I cease the saint act otherwise, forthwith. Of course I'm no Jesus, but had agreed to play the wily Nazarene in a re-enactment scene with Satan at hell's Freezing Man Festival this summer, held on the dark side of Uranus. An inhospitable venue, but somehow arrangements were made. I'd turned down a major contract with Big Evil when I was young, but apparently the dude liked my 'tude, been after me ever since. Finally, in exchange for a large, anonymous donation to genetic research on Earth, I'd agreed. My only regret had come at the end of the gig, just before Satan had teleported me through the wormhole back home, when he told me he'd planned on making the donation anyway.

"Better genes, bigger harvests," he'd hissed, winking like a Monsanto seed rep.

That said, understandably some ankle-yanking might be alleged when I mention my relationship with Scarlett; I get that a lot. But word, I met her in L.A. when I was working as a fluffer for female movie stars, warming them up for love scenes that needed to be torrid on camera. I was old enough to be her father, but all I did was give her a good foot massage and let her nosh about elitism in art, and within minutes she was able to convincingly suck face with Johnny Depp, a guy probably twenty years younger than me, certainly hotter, yet without the vaguest idea about how to warm a girl up. With me, need I say, snap—Scar knew right away I was somebody she could call anytime night or day, and open up and just talk dirty or say whatever she wanted to me. We were tight like that, from the start.

Anyway, now fallen back in my terran lair, exhausted from overstudied messianic affectation before millions of minions camped out on the frozen wasteland of another planet, I lit a cigarette and dozed out on my excelsior bed, watching methane sandflakes bubble up and evaporate from my socks. I woke with a start, suddenly realizing I was famished. I'd conscientiously avoided all the deep-fried food that had been catered to Uranus from hell's kitchen, and the Zen Fruit Jerky trailmix I'd brought from Earth for snacks had vanished after the first cast party.

Then I remembered I was back in the ringtone zone of the solar system. I phoned my friend Annie—easily my equal in powers of arousal and restraint, catch and release—and told her I had to have food pronto that could not only revive me, but help me through the starvation I was suffering from my no-pork pact with starlet Scarlett.

Annie apprehended my manifest destiny instantly. She suggested I meet her at the Korma Sutra in Westport, an Indian restaurant famous for their lunch buffet.

I parked right down off funky Broadway and walked through the cobblestone alley to Pennsylvania. Irresistibly my eyes were drawn to the erotic blue windows of Korma Sutra. In my weak yet passionate condition, they flashed like facets of a brilliant opaque gem in which I saw myself not only making love with multiple women, but actually trying more than one position.

Once inside, I saw Annie laughing in a booth by herself, her eyelids low and sultry as she turned her gaze on me. She was already high on her first mango lassi. I could tell she was hooked, heavy as boiled potatoes. Her head lolled back and the low neckline of her blouse flared, revealing a lacy black bra.

“Hey baby,” she murmured, waxing rapt as she marveled at the flavorful artwork that surrounded us on the walls and window glass, “Dig the art.”

She nodded to a sumptuous mural that covered the north wall, titled *Devi and the Lion*. Lots of turquoise and drama—probably a scene from some Indian folk tale, but after over a month in the desert with the Great Liar, I confess I wasn’t overly impressed with little *Devi*’s pussy lion and the dainty duo’s litter box vision quest.

Balding, disheveled, and jetlagged from a bumpy time-space rip round the rings of Saturn, it was all I could do to slide into the booth and feel nominally man enough to quaff Annie’s physical beauty. Her hair was dark and thick like pure, original Coca Cola, spun strands of brown cocaine and cane sugar, sparking tiny comets of pop. Tan arms bare and inviting, eyes star heroin—what better way to renew than chase a little dragon? Like Scarlett, she was half my age and thus a true love taboo. Still I longed to talk politely with her like a well-mannered James Mason, trying to make the best of his uncomfortable role in that movie *Lolita*.

“Looking lovely as ever, Annie,” I crooned. She knew I was only kidding; she was hot as a sulfur fire on Venus, and I was not.

“Not so bad yourself,” she rejoined, smiling wryly. Her eyes grappled with

the crown of thorns I was still wearing from my last performance as Jesus on Uranus, with “Rex” written on the front in blood.

“Sexy...Rexy? Sweet. Very chill.”

I reached across the table, spread my palms to her, and let her palpate my stigmata. She held my hands, but the fake wounds still felt raw and I had to pull back.

I knocked back a few shots of lassi and let the sensuous ambience suffuse me. Warm aromas of cumin and curry and baking naan mingled like pheromones in the simmering air, swaddling me like a heated bathrobe. I could feel my temperature rise as, under the table, Annie accidentally split my shin with her shoe tip. Spiked with pain, I parried and plunged my size 14 Asics running shoe deep between her butt and purse onto the seat beside her, but briefly, teasing her with my size and length. Annie teetered and tittered in dull surprise, her hand rising but forgetting to cover her mouth.

After some conversational groping and foreplay, we rose in unison, now enthralled by the plangent Hindu voodoo song playing somewhere, driving us hungrily, inexorably—repeatedly—to the buffet table. There, a heavenly gauntlet of gustatory delights stretched before us, divinely overprotected by the awning wings of the Indian deity Sneezegard.

We made our way slowly down the line, piling on helping after helping of korma, masala, biriyani, and those wonderful dumpling balls in sweet syrup, called jamun balls, that Annie jammed in her cheeks and gently masticated like wads of fine French toast.

Somewhere in the maelstrom of sensation that ensued, Annie and I found the aplomb to speak between bites. She mentioned being Scottish, to which I huskily growled “lukka thungle mawt?”—which is how one quips “like a single malt?” with a mouth full of naan and tandoori goat.

My own heritage is predominantly English, so we plundered that buffet like Pizarro did Peru. When finally we thought of ending our rapacious frenzy, Annie was on her sixth lassi, and I was greedily tipping chai.

Our waitress, a seasoned attendant, quietly brought us a tray of steaming towels. Annie and I dragged the white serpents languidly across each other’s flesh, leaving them coiled dead where they dropped on the table.

“Holy Mother of Vishnu,” I managed to ejaculate between jamun balls, “That was great, Annie.” Lazily, I smeared my moist forehead with the back of my korma-

dappled hand.

"Yeah. That was fun," she breathed, obviously still seeing stars. "Thanks for joining me."

I could tell her world had been authentically rocked by the dazzling variety and spunk of the buffet, if not my own general finesse and sotto voce savoir-faire. Eventually I was able to peer through the fog of my beached-whale afterglow and somehow meandered over to the register. In a flourish of casual swank, I chatted nattily with the cashier and told her to put everything on my expense account, actually my personal Mastercard. Annie smiled admiringly, and we strolled back out to a chilly bright afternoon.

We stood together on the sidewalk, savoring the last moments of what we both knew had been something strange, lovely, and rarely shared. We hugged briefly and smiled at each other; saying nothing, we parted. As Annie elegantly crossed the street on the way to her car, she let loose a magnificent, rolling, hula-popper fart, which thundered up Scot-free like a Clydesdale galloping over the old bricks and mortar.

My port brow arched high and with a squint, I unopened my starboard eye. Aye, thought I, zipping up my mack with fond relish, there's a fine lassi. The devil on Uranus was heinous, yes—and Annie's mango-quickenened love emission, hot steam over rim and stone in the stinky sutra sweat lodge of temptation on Earth.

It Was Just The Day

I should have known this would happen. Who couldn't see the signs? Besides me, apparently. Let's review.

I woke up fifteen minutes before my alarm went off. I reached over and flipped the switch before it even had a chance to sound its static-filled recording of cathedral bells. I lay in bed for a few minutes and stared out the window, letting the feeling of total peace wash over me. The sky was a flat grey, signifying how uneventful the day was going to be. I rolled over and stretched, not minding the thought of a boring day at all.

Eventually, I dragged myself from both bed and reverie. This wasn't as hard as I thought it would be, as the house was warm, though we'd left the windows open all night. I picked up my book on the way to the kitchen and read a chapter during breakfast. The house was perfectly still when I got in the shower. I reveled in the hot water, free from anyone else wanting to use the bathroom. It was warm for October, but I knew the blessing of warmth wouldn't last. I took the time to shave my legs so I could wear shorts to school. I picked out my favorite pair: the orange plaid I'd found on clearance. Who knew when I would be able to wear shorts again?

I left the house, my family just starting to make sounds of awakening as I closed the door. I realized my gas tank was nearly empty when I got into my car. It wasn't that big of a deal – since I'd woken early, I had plenty of time to get gas before my first class began. The price of gas had dropped ten cents. I decided I had enough money to go get a slush from inside the gas station. I chose a mix of cherry and cola flavor, then paid and took off for school.

I'm probably the only person who drives with their windows down and the heater on. I didn't mind. I put my favorite CD in the player and enjoyed the wind in my hair, the heater keeping the temperature perfect. The drive to school ended all too soon.

That was about the end of my good day. The moment I walked through the door of the classroom, the dullness of being in class set in. Like machines, my classmates and I took our habitual seats. We listened to the lectures and copied down notes. As I settled into my routine, I realized the atmosphere of my peers was somewhat tense, as though everyone was waiting for something. I didn't share in their feeling, but it was so thick in the air, I felt like I could see it. I wondered what it

was about for a while before my head clouded back over with sociology terms and math equations, the tedious information banishing all other thoughts from my mind. By the time I finished with my last class, I had forgotten all about the tension.

The grey day had darkened drastically since I had entered the building my classes took place in. It looked like a storm was on the way, though the air felt as dry as if it were a bright, sunshiney day. My skin prickled in the warm air, some force imitating static electricity and making my hair stand on end. I quickly walked to my car and started the trek home. As I neared my house, I turned onto a quiet neighborhood street. A curse slipped from my lips as I was forced to slam on my brakes.

There in the middle of the road sat a huge raven. It stared at me, and I at it. I was shocked that it hadn't flown away when it saw my car coming down the street. It looked like it had just flown from an Edgar Allen Poe story. It watched me for a few moments, then looked away and lifted lazily into the air, allowing me to pass. I did so, cautiously. I was unnerved by the raven. It gave me a nod from the tree branch it chose to land on. Somehow, I felt as though it were wishing me luck in my travels. *How odd*, I thought, trying to rid myself of the electrical feeling that had returned to my skin.

I got home, and the family was gone. A note on the table claimed that they had gone to visit my grandparents and would be back late tonight. The fact didn't bother me too much; I wasn't in the mood for company. I changed out of my shorts into a pair of ragged jeans that already had several bleach stains on them, then began the arduous task of cleaning my corner of the house. This was a Friday ritual that pleased both myself and my mother, who was a stickler for chores.

A few hours later, I was feeling rather good. I had scrubbed the bathroom, vacuumed my room, and dusted my assorted knickknacks. All I had left to do was some laundry and I was done. I was slightly tired, I smelled of bleach, and I had music blaring from the surround sound system in the living room. I felt relaxed in a way I can only achieve by performing this cleaning ritual.

As I headed down the stairs to unload the dryer and put the wet clothes from the washer in, the power shut off. I gave a start, but then laughed. It went with the day. The clouds, the raven, the edginess....It just seemed natural that the power would go off. It was as though the spirit of Halloween was blessing me. As I contemplated this, my phone buzzed in the pocket of my jeans, letting out a loud gong a moment later. I pulled my phone out of the pocket, one new text message

blinking on the screen. I flipped it open and opened the message. [Are you home?] The text questioned. It was from my best friend, Reuben. [Yeah! Where are you?] I asked in reply. A knock sounded at the front door. Laughing, I let him in. He had a strange look on his face, as though he had just put something in his mouth he really shouldn't have. I figured it was due to the fact that I smelled strongly of bleach from the thorough cleaning my bathroom had just received.

"What's up?" I asked.

"She broke up with me," he said, his voice hoarse.

Though sympathetic, I couldn't help but smile a little. He went through relationships like most people went through paper towels.

"Aw, poor you," I replied, heading back to the laundry room.

He followed me, as I knew he would. As long as we'd been best friends, it was just sort of natural for us to keep doing chores when the other came over. We had long since passed the stage where one or the other's presence allowed us a "guest pass" from doing chores.

"Yeah..." he said quietly.

I looked up at him, taking some T-shirts from the dryer and folding them on the table. It was then I noticed he looked kind of bad. I realized it must have been one of his nastier breakups.

"So why'd she break up with you?" I wanted to know.

"Because of you," he said.

I sighed. Not again. It was discouraging how many girls had problems with Reuben having a female for a best friend. He had always said that didn't matter. That didn't stop him from getting frustrated now and again. To tell you the truth, it frustrated me quite a bit too. I hated that our purely fraternal friendship affected our relationships. It had lost him several girlfriends, and had cost me a boyfriend or two.

"Oh...I'm sorry, Rube," I said. I came across a new t-shirt of mine, "Hey, look at this, isn't it funny? I got it the other day—" He cut me off.

"Tara, you don't get it. She broke up with me because of you. It's your fault, just like always," Reuben snapped. About this time, I began to realize something was up.

"You've always said that didn't matter, that the girl you marry will be cool with us. Dude, we've been best friends since we could walk. We just kind of go together like siblings. Like Luke and Leia," I reminded him.

He nodded, "That is the problem, isn't it?"

Now I noticed the funny tone his voice had taken on.

"Where are you going with this, Rube?" I asked, taking my pile of t-shirts up to my room.

I set them on my bed and turned around to face Reuben. He pulled out the knife I'd bought him for his birthday a few years back. Right on cue, the dark grey clouds decided it was time to let out a bolt of lightning, followed by a rather impressive crash of thunder. I would have laughed at how cliché this whole day was turning out to be were it not for the fact that I was suddenly wondering if my best friend hadn't snapped. Instead of laughing, I took a step back, my heart speeding up. I suddenly found it harder to breathe.

"You're my favorite person in the world, Tara. But I can't let you get in the way of my life anymore. If I can't stay away from you with you here, then I'll just have to remove you from my life....permanently!"

I stared at him when he finished this speech. I couldn't believe it. It didn't even sound real. Then it hit me. Reuben was *kidding*. He was always pretty nuts for Halloween. He had probably spent all night the previous night watching badly made horror films and was now feeling like playing pretend due to his lack of sleep and bad-horror-movie-high. I relaxed a little. It was just a game. Just like always.

"Oh no!" I cried out in mock terror, putting my hand on each side of my face dramatically, "Someone help, he's going to kill me!"

Fireworks exploded in my vision, as the sky supplied another perfectly timed crash of thunder. I sank to my knees, my hands flying to my face. My lip had split. I started shaking as I felt my fingers become slick with my own blood, terrified. My previous theory was now blown out of the water. He was very serious.

"If you're not going to take me seriously..." he murmured, almost sounding apologetic.

I looked up at him in horror. Lightning lit up his face, which was stony and terrible. I had never seen him like that before. He was pale, gaunt. His eyes looked hollow and dead as he took a step toward me.

"Reuben, wait," I said, my voice an octave too high and muffled from my swelling lip.

"I'm sorry, Tara. I can't do this anymore," Reuben said, his voice full of regret as he took another step.

I didn't scream. There was no way I could. The knife slid into me easily, entirely missing my heart. I was now laying on my bedroom floor with a gaping knife wound in my abdomen, spilling blood onto my freshly vacuumed floor. I stared up

at Reuben, whose jeans were covered in my blood as well. They were his favorite jeans. I guess that was going to have to be a good enough revenge; I couldn't really do anything else.

Looking back, which is all I have to do now, I really don't have too much of a choice but to find it amusing. The day was a perfect setup for this ending. I'm loving it, I sort of wish we'd recorded it. It would make a great movie someday, you know, if Reuben ever gets out of prison for murdering me and all. It's a shame that he had to do something like this. He really did have a good life going for him. He was in school, and planning on being a history professor. He was pretty smart. Eventually he would have gotten the girl of his dreams, gotten married, had kids...he was really headed for great things until he killed me. A whole life—wasted.

I'm staring at Reuben while I'm thinking about all this, but my vision is starting to fade. For some reason, all I can see is that raven sitting on the road, nodding at me knowingly. Now that I think about it, I think that raven knew this was going to happen. Ravens have a way of knowing things like that, don't they? In all the best stories, they seem to.

In my mind, I nod back to the raven. All is well, I think. It was just the way the day was going.

May Flowers for Me

Four days after my New Zealand wax in Nevada, Missouri, the hot itch of new growth reminded me of my latest burning ambition. I pulled off on an old back road south of the Big Nit City Outlet Mall and into the parking lot of Baubblehead's Barber & Beauty College of Design, where I had registered to take an inter-break class on "Combing and Cutting" through the Credit for Any Old Thing Program offered by Avila University in Kansas City. I knew it wouldn't be easy, since I even have trouble trimming my fingernails, and normally I chew off or pull out my own hair. But, I thought, this could be a chance to learn scissor skills in a foreign land. Why not?

BBBCOD has a vast campus that fits right into the natural terrain like a good haircut. The quad is terraced halfway up a large mountain, and students dive off the old belltower into a huge lake that encircles the peak near the top. Below, windsurfers would ply the muddy Cadbury River upstream, while kayakers sailed down farther on, hoping to survive the chilly White Chocolate Rapids that started foaming up just before the Oklahoma border.

Too bad I won't be able to enjoy any of that, I thought. The class was to be a weeklong cage match, in which students and teacher would battle each other to the roots over hair—knuckle to head, elbow to merkin—till only one stylist could finally emerge, blown clean and dry. I felt like a big burly logger guy in a plaid shirt, surrounded by forest and ready to kick ax, except I had on a tight turtleneck and cargo shorts and would have settled for cuddling.

I decided to head on over to Sassoon Hall and check in with Par Snips, Dean of Extensions. Maybe he could tell me where to pee, and after that, where to stow my gear.

"Horace! Hey Ho, is that you?"

I hadn't heard that voice in years. The last time had been right after surgery to remove a jump drive that had leapt into my colon. I turned around.

"Flavia? Flav, I..."

"Still talking the old dot dot dot, are you?" She was a vision, standing there on the mountain steps, casually tossing her blonde-red curls as she flashed a gray grin.

"But, but--"

"More of a dash dash man now, huh?" she shot back.

I felt as if I were poised at a deer crossing in the Crossroads, peering down the crosshairs of a rifle scope, locked between two horns on the dragon of a dilemma. It was battering me from below and behind, like a mountain ram springing up and down the sheer red cliffs of Kansas. As I stood on the high precipice of the parking lot, my passionate and demanding ex-girlfriend Flavia behind me, I gazed up at the gigantic geodesic dome skinhead ahead. It had been shaved and buffed till it reflected sun like a flesh-colored Sprint Center. Yes, there it was: the legendary gleaming Glamourdome, where like thousands of wannabes before me, I saw myself soon graduating as victor, even if my name was Horace. The colossal smooth skull top was flanked by bushy old Sassoon Hall which adjoined modest Mousse Mullet Auditorium (named after one of BBBCOD's famous founding faculty, Gel "Mousse" Mullet, better known as Lilly Bob at night).

I was still every bit the tenacious, colorful, and vain Eagle-winged snapdaddy who fearlessly hawked old copies of *The Scop and Talon* to freshmen and visitors for a dollar apiece in Marian Center back at Avila. I'd led a hardscrabble life and I wasn't afraid to seize a day, nay, but I was wanting to run like a schoolyard ninny from Flavia. I was hoping she didn't mind too awfully much waiting and waiting while I considered what to say next, though after several hours driving nonstop on the road to get there, my bladder was quietly giving me shit.

I remembered the first time Flavia had incongruously stumbled into my life—somewhere in the lobby of a primitive Colorado inn, on one of my early safaris west of Durango, north of Mosca. We sat on tall stools at the continental breakfast bar, both high on sugary store-bought pastry and mojitos, but tentative with the heavy evasiveness that morning liquor brings.

"Sell you this cinnamon roll for 50 cents," I'd offered her, trying to hustle money for a *USA Today* from the lobby. I was planning to flip that for a dollar from the desk clerk after I'd read it.

"The continental breakfast is free," she'd grumbled, then handed me a dollar.

Long story short, I soon quit my job and persuaded her to stick around while she paid for me to go back to school. I enrolled in the Avila-Advantage-To-String-It-Out-As-Long-As-You-Can-Degree Program, which would allow me to get a Bachelor's in Desultory Studies after only six years. It seemed like nothing could stop me, especially since I was going so slow. But so was life with Flavia.

After my colon surgery, I'd lied and told her I loved her but she'd have to leave. I'd said the doctors had told me having a girlfriend could cause me to spontaneously disembowel at any time, and that wasn't what either of us wanted. She'd run away crying from my bedside and never come back.

Now, out of nowhere, an errant student diving from the BBBCOD belltower overshot the lake higher up the terraced campus peak and hurtled down directly onto Flavia, suddenly obliterating her with a loud BODY-BUMP noise before I could utter one word from the precipice.

I was stunned. I knew viscerally I would eventually miss her, and the money she used to send me to pay tuition, books and incidentals—regular checks she'd kept mailing even after our split. But now, perhaps, I would be truly be on my own. I was about to wet my pants.

As the bell in the tower tolled wildly above for the smashed people in the parking lot, I let loose and planted my dribbling foot decisively into the wide, tethered ring of destiny.

"And how would you like your hair cut today?" I murmured to myself, rehearsing my opening scissor moves like karate in the thin mountain air.

The Gun

John Suhndun stood at his barred window, looking at the thick clouds that hung over the dark and abandoned ground from a room under the prison. The outside world had been reduced to dried husks of wood that jutted out of the ground and a large indentation where the pond had been until it dried up. John observed the land only because it led his focus away from his repugnant confinement. The world had moved on from the final war without leaving any person to help, and he was trapped within the cell's blackened walls. Forever would he have to consume what little fungus grew, the occasional half-dead rat that attempted to stagger by, and the cellmate that had expired four months prior. That was, of course, unless he left under the last man-made thunder his part of the world would ever know.

The cold, black gun sat on the crusted, rusted pipes suspended over the dampened floor. It cried out to the prisoner. John elevated the gun and remembered obtaining it from the last guard of the prison. That had been the guard who ran off to find help after not being able to get John out: the guard that had never returned. Once a month since obtaining the revolver, John took out the cylinder of the gun to find a bullet in every other chamber. After checking, he spun the cylinder and snapped it back into position without looking at what chamber was aligned with the barrel. If he was wanted by either God or Satan, then one or both would try to take him, but the gun had always produced a click.

Only four days had passed since John last played his version of Russian roulette, but the prisoner was overcome by a depression worse than ever before. The pouring rain caused blood-stained mud to slide down from the window of his cell. He could not remember how the blood had gotten there or how long ago. The prisoner had not seen a single person but his decaying husk of a cellmate in five months, and he had not seen rain since before the world moved on six months ago. Nevertheless, the blood that descended from his window with the mud was authentic, and of that he had no doubt.

Such an appalling sight reminded him of the night before his thirtieth anniversary, when his wife was found on the rocky basin of the Missouri River. Her head had been bashed open, blood liberally decorating the rocks. That morning, the couple had discussed starting the celebration, but their words were not kind upon departure. For the thousand nights after, John wanted to go back and

apologize for the childish argument; he wanted his final words to have been sweet and gentle. Alas, nothing could change history.

He saw nothing that could help him obtain forgiveness until the moment he sat with the gun and watched blood ooze down the wall of his cell. John then thought of what sent him to the prison. When the bank robbers had forced him to shoot the clerk, it made him want to turn the gun on himself, but there were no bullets left for him when it was over. The prisoner begged for death row, but never got death.

After the distant mushroom clouds dissipated, everyone else died while John remained locked under the prison. His final thought of dread was what forced the world onward. The explosions that had taken the lives of everyone had left little impact on John until thoughts of his children seeped into his mind. His son would have celebrated his fifth wedding anniversary, but was thrown into a scorching oblivion a day before. John's daughter would have been seven months pregnant. Both she and the unborn child were burned and boiled when the bombs came to move the world away from the human era.

John thought of the three things that should have killed him long ago as he sat in the cold and darkened cell. He released the cylinder, made sure that one of the three bullets was aligned with the barrel, and raised the gun to his temple. Pulling back the hammer, John looked at the puddle of blood and mud that had formed on the floor. He pulled the trigger, but heard only the report. John fired the gun again, hearing nothing but a click. The chamber was empty. He tried the remaining chambers, but felt no pain and saw no wounds. Not even death wanted him.

Eggshell

I once viewed Native American women just like I think of the Native American men –stubborn and ridiculously brave. All those stories and songs about their never giving up and dying before they would submit; I thought they stood for something pure and right. I grew up under the assumption that they were all, for the most part, just like the Disney version of Pocahontas and nothing like the white people who showed up to enslave and exterminate them. Then I realized that this image was nothing more than something I'd created in my mind to satisfy my escapist ideals. Always wishing to be that princess who was willing to create chaos and break out of her predetermined mold, I projected my ideal woman onto an entire culture.

I read about Native American traditions for a class. There was an excerpt from Navarre Scott Momaday that related the tale of a woman who had been told to wait outside a teepee until the man who had brought her there permitted her to enter. The man's father happened to also be inside the teepee and knew that his son had stolen the woman from her husband while he had gone away on a raid. There was snow on the ground and the girl didn't have enough garments to keep her warm while the father forced his son stay inside the teepee. They waited until her feet were frozen.

Momaday went a step further in depicting the status of women within this culture in stating that the only group holding a lower station was that of the slaves. The father in this story used the woman as an example to emphasize a point and to punish his son for his actions. She was a pawn and did not hold a great deal of worth for either of them. She was the vessel through which they affected one another. I have begun to wonder if, after being repeatedly subjected to that treatment and perspective regarding women, she had developed a lack of self value. She grew up in a society that had a very specific and low opinion of her and in which she may not have seen any escape. Those ideas regarding her, over a long period of time, pervaded her thoughts and actions.

I went to work this afternoon prepared for the usual day; dreary yet stressful and devoid of any entertainment save the sardonic banter that I sometimes manage with my co-workers. I was in no way, shape, or form ready for Gladys. She was almost too easy to label just by her appearance. Type A personality with a deep,

guttural love for high-priced coffee. Luckily, we have a Starbucks in our store, and as she strutted up to the counter in her pink lounge-wear suit, she clutched the white paper venti with a claw-like hand near her double-D ta-tas (probably fake). She was in dire need of an undershirt, and an over indulgence in fake-baking gave her an eerie orange glow that somehow managed a green tint. The overall color really set off the red highlights in her brunette Elvira hair. In her other hand was an ominous receipt for her dry-cleaning. Under most circumstances, I don't feel intimidated by the customers. They come, sometimes they complain or yell, then they leave and my life goes on. There was something about Gladys, however, that made my limbs stiff and my hair want to stand on end.

It was the weekend and while the store wasn't too incredibly busy, there were still one or two check-out lanes open with customers and cashiers waiting on them. As the hot pink velour stopped in front of me, I noticed more than one man tilt his head ever so slightly in her direction to get a view of the back, including the guy at register four with two crying children and a woman who looked to be his significant other. I had to roll my eyes. It's not something I do habitually but it wasn't intentional either. It just happened.

She's better looking than you are. There was a recurring voice in my head over which I couldn't seem to gain control. It was my own, most definitely, but it kept springing up over and over again with little warning. I had dealt with the voice before, on occasion, but now it seemed to grow more prominent. *She's better looking than you.* Usually I had a pretty firm control over my thoughts. The more important and coherent ones I would acknowledge and either disregard or build upon depending on their relevance and validity. But these new thoughts were forceful. They presented an issue with which I was entirely unfamiliar because I couldn't make them go away. *She's better looking.*

When I looked back at her, the woman was already glaring. She had seen my eye rolling and I was glad for the counter between us.

"Ah'm here tuh pick up mah draw-cleanin'." She said it so fast that I had trouble understanding her.

"I'm sorry, what did you need?"

"Ah say-ed, Ah'm here... tuh pick up... mah draw-cleanin'." She thrust the ticket at my face and raised her voice just a little when she said, "Gladys Overbraught."

"Alright." I took the ticket and turned around to the computer to look up the order for 'Gladys Overbright.'

"Is everything okay?" My co-worker, Cleveland, had overheard Gladys and probably sensed that tension, too. He leaned against that back counter with a strip of film in his hand while I searched for her order on the computer.

"It's all good." I tried to be nonchalant about it. I could take care of myself, but I knew Cleveland would like to handle it all for me. As flattering as this might have been, I couldn't neglect that princess who wanted to be different. She wouldn't let me give in to that kind of treatment because she had an idea that he would take too much pride in fulfilling the role of "protector." She had no desire to be submissive.

The computer printout she handed me said that the clothes were due back by 6 p. m. tonight and it was still only 2. I could feel the heat on the back of my head as she penetrated my skull with her demonic heat vision – well, that's what it felt like. I knew she was staring and she kept taking loud sips of her steaming coffee as if to remind me that she was still there, still waiting, and I had better produce five immaculate, sparkling garments soon. I just wanted to go home. After the computer system gave me the run-around, I went behind the back counter to look on the clothing rack. It took a few seconds of holding down the left arrow button on the mechanical rack to find the 'O' section. In it hung just three items for pick-up under her name. *Grand*, I thought as I picked them up and brought them to her. *Now she's probably going to eat me.*

I hung the clothes on the front metal rack attached to the service counter. She's better looking than you. I couldn't make it stop. *She's better-she's better.* I waited a moment then started ringing up her order on the register while she examined the items for stains and other damages that might have been done in the cleaning process.

"That's eleven-fifty if you want to pick up this part of your order now," I told her, just to see if I could get the ball rolling.

She turned back to me, still a little squinty-eyed, and said, "Ah thought Ah dropped auf more than this. Mah ticket sayed Ah had fahv pieces."

"You're right, it does," I explained to her, "It's just that sometimes, with this system, the orders get split." I showed her my copy of the ticket which had been separated into two orders, "See, they put two on this ticket and three on this other one."

"So Ah have two sep'rit orders?" She took my receipts and stared hard at them for a moment.

"No, just the one. And usually they all come in at the same time, but sometimes it's like this and one comes in before the other." I had the urge to tear my copies of the ticket out of her hands. I resisted and let her continue vaporizing them with her death-ray gaze. *She's better looking.*

"But these items really aren't due to be here 'til 6 tonight. I'm sure they're on their way now if you want to wait and come back."

She tapped her manicured nails on the counter and took another obnoxious sip of her coffee while studying the three tickets once again.

"Alraught. Ah'll be back et six, then," she said, still irritated.

I actually found myself breathing that cliché sigh of relief as she stalked away. *She's better than you.* She didn't seem too rude, but there was something about her that made me feel like I was walking on eggshells and as soon as one of them broke, it would cause an explosion. As she walked, still noisily sipping her coffee, I noticed one of my more talkative managers, Rob, watching her go. His puppy eyes lingered just below her waist before he turned toward me. I gave him a look that told him I knew. He grinned and shrugged, then surveyed the front end of the store before approaching my counter. At the same moment, I saw Cleveland heading my way from his film counter. He usually shared his opinion too freely and, as our departments were so near each other, I had the pleasure of hearing it all the time when we were scheduled together.

"Did you see her? I mean, did you see her?" He was so excited it was scary. There was practically drool leaking from the corners of his mouth. "I'm sorry, but you can't blame me, I mean, I just can't help it sometimes. You saw her!" "I know, but you can help it. It all comes from up here," I said, pointing at the top of my head.

I'm not sure why I tell him these things. He never listens, but he's my favorite manager because he's easy to get along with and he tries not to be demanding when telling the rest of us what to do. I think I'd really hate to see him get caught by the boss while talking to a tall, thin blonde who obviously didn't need help finding anything while the lines got backed up and other, less attractive customers got angry. This has happened before. *She's better looking than you are.* She's better-she's better. I think I felt sorry for him, too. He was sociable, energetic, and maybe a little too talkative, but I think it was his grey flecked hair that drove away so many of the women he pursued.

Rob was the polar opposite of Anna, which is to be pronounced like "on-

a," not "Anne-a." Something about her always rubbed me the wrong way. She was a manager so she knew she had authority over the cashiers and people working other departments, but that never seemed to be enough for her. She was a regular evil, grocery store stepmom; like the popular girl in high school who not only had all the friends and guys she wanted, but then had to lord it over anyone and everyone of a lower social class. As if any of us cared. Just yesterday afternoon, the crazy day after payday, some of the bills in my register had been shoved in facing the wrong direction. When Anna counted the drawer and found them, she chewed me out over it and said there was never an excuse for making such a mistake. I guess making customers unhappy is worth taking a few extra moments to make sure everything is prim and proper in the register. She wasn't the one who had to stand there, awkwardly apologizing to everyone, while the consumerist robots were breathing fire down her neck. So when Anna walked in to take over Rob's shift, I was certain my day was doomed.

"I don't understand Rob sometimes. He actually liked her?" Cleveland was still standing at my counter, tapping a pen on it while I began organizing a stack of receipts, "I mean not that she wasn't impressive or anything, but did you see her skin color? And her hair. I wonder what might be living in that."

"I don't know. Rob's just always been like that about women, I guess. I think he judges mostly what they look like on the outside. Although his taste is a little weird sometimes."

"Besides, she was really rude. I could hear her from my counter."

"Yeah, well maybe there was something else bothering her. I know I've done that before." *Why am I defending her?* "Sometimes I get angry at someone for no reason because I'm really angry about something else." But she was such a jerk and a cliché one at that.

"Yeah, maybe. But did you see how much makeup she was wearing? It always makes me wonder what women are covering up when they do that. What secrets are they hiding under it?" He laughed at his own words while I kept turning receipts around and checking them to make sure they were in the right order. I was missing two.

"Oh, you're doing it wrong." Cleveland reached out to take the stack from me.

"Be my guest." I stepped aside instead of arguing with him, "Hey, do you have a sister?"

"Yeah, a younger one, why?"

"Just curious. Do you ever have to watch those Disney princess movies with her?"

"Yeah, all the time. They're so annoying. I keep telling her they aren't getting the stories right, but she never listens to me. Why do you ask?"

I shrugged and tried to find something else to do.

Things went surprisingly well for the next four-and-a-half hours. My department was far from busy aside from the lotto players and those who were dropping off more laundry. I didn't even talk to Anna too much until Gladys came back at around 7 p.m. All five of her garments were now present. As she walked to my counter, dressed exactly as she was before, I again noticed several of the men in the store, including more than one manager, now glancing in our direction. She's better-she's better-she's better than you. This time she simply dropped her copy of the receipt on the counter and tapped her nails until I retrieved all of her order. When I came back to the service counter and hung her garments on the rack again, I found her studying three slips of paper.

"Was that everything for you?" I tried to sound courteous but there was tension just billowing off her. She's better looking.

"Yes, Ah believe so."

"It's twenty-two-fifty total." I just wish you would leave. I forced a smile.

"Hold on a minute na'." So bad. "What a-bat mah discount?"

"They gave you the discount." I showed her the information tagged to each set of clothing hanging on the rack, "This one doesn't have it listed because it was separated, but the other set has the total discount taken off for both."

Her eyes got smaller and I was slightly impressed at how often she utilized the chance to glare at me, "It sayes here on mah receipt thet Ah git ten percent auf mah orders. Ah brought these in on Tuesdee, and thet's how Ah'm s'posed to git ten percent."

"Yes ma'am, and that's what the cleaning company gave you. Your total was twenty-five dollars and on this tag it shows where they took off two dollars and fifty cents. That's ten percent."

She stared at me blankly, "Thet's not what Ah came up with. Ah think yew can see here how Ah got two orders and Ah'm s'posed to git ten percent auf of 'em."

"Ma'am, as I told you before, those receipts were just my copies. You only have the one order, as it shows on your ticket. This is the discount the company

gave you. We don't have a lot to do with their prices and discounts because we aren't the cleaning service." We just deal with their customers for them." *We just distribute for them.* I can show you how it works out on a calculator."

She glared again and folded her arms to emphasize her point, "Ah would lahk to see a manager."

"No problem." I called one over the intercom and, wouldn't you know it, my favorite came to greet me with a scowl of her own. They're like long-separated twins, I thought, At least in the realm of facial expressions.

"Ha Anne-a, Ah'm havin' an ish-you." I could tell Anna was truly pleased to hear it. "Ah had t' come back up here t' pick up mah orders because they wasn't all ready on tahm. Na' Ah have two sep'rit sets of clothing and Ah'm supposed to git ten percent off of them."

Anna studied my register screen to see what I had done and then looked silently at the receipts and tags on the clothing. I knew she wasn't dumb. She had to have known what Gladys was doing.

"Alright, I'm sorry about the misunderstanding." She quickly typed in the code that overrode my limited cashier allowances and gave Gladys a second discount before walking quickly to a register with a blinking light.

A few moments later, after Gladys had finally left and I could breathe again, Anna came back. "You probably don't know this yet, but when a customer comes up here and wants to get angry over something, you're supposed to avoid that. Just call one of us up here before things get ugly and be sure you don't argue with them. We can write you up for that."

I knew better than to respond with anything but an "Okay. I will," and a blank face. I'd only been at the store for four short years. Not a lot of experience there. I was ready to quit at that moment, but I didn't. I just kept my mouth shut and waited outside that teepee while my feet froze.

The Lord's Supper

"Does wisdom perhaps appear on the earth as a raven which is inspired by the smell of carrion?"

- Friedrich Nietzsche

I

A small wagon struggles southward, limping dispiritedly behind eight legs of braying beast. Mounted atop his perch above the two animals, Dennison Quigley surveys panoramic miles of observable Oklahoma nothing, his vulture nose cocked to the air in perpetual hunt.

Quigley is a thespian of considerable talent. Self-anointed man of God – reeve of remedial elixirs and tonics – he claims the Cloth to procure transient kindnesses, while wielding a counterfeit staff of Aesculapius like a money-harvesting scythe. Scarcely has he suffered a night absent of full belly and creature comfort in this patchwork landscape of similitudinary naïveté, despite an abiding disinclination toward manual labor of any kind.

Yet Quigley's luck has been on a considerable holiday of late. Every passing day reveals a widening expanse of dusty distress swirling about him. God's gray earth has decided to take summer wing, a perverse blanket of grit, hell-bent on reclaiming every animated and sentient part of itself. For a man like Quigley, whose only sustenance is extracted from the abundant fruit of human kindness, this lingering plague of dust is bad business. It drives people to seek cover, while driving hospitality right out of their hearts. The past two and a half weeks have yielded barely the straggiest scrap of prayerful humanity upon whom to prey.

Quigley extracts a yellowing handkerchief, curled stiff with service, and mops ineffectually at his forehead. As he repockets the cloth, a fly alights on his barren lips, perhaps seeking the Northwest Passage amidst that ruined web of peeling crevices. Quigley waves tiredly at the tiny intruder, a gesture that, from afar, might be mistaken as salutation to a fellow traveler. The dislodged fly, perceiving a glint of moisture within, darts between lips and teeth in single-minded madness. Quigley's reflexive response greets the guest, an unwilling swallow that brings shivers of disgust to both parties.

The journey continues. Directly, Quigley's search is rewarded. A ramshackle estate rises amidst scraggly yellow-green patches of uncertain

triumph. Hope, however faint, stirs in his breast. "Nourishment ho, my lads!" he encourages his exhausted entourage. Quigley guides the wagon toward this tiny parcel of makeshift Promised Land. Not until he is practically upon it does he see the rotten hitching post, nor the girl, certainly no more than 15 years of age, drawing water from a well beside it.

"Whoa gentlemen!" Quigley instructs, pulling sharply on the reins in reinforcing admonition to his beasts of burden. The mules need little persuasion to desist their struggles, and stop so abruptly that Quigley is nearly ejected from their company. He swallows an oath that threatens its own ejection, pauses briefly to compose his carriage, and addresses his would-be provider in the sweetest manner his parched voice can manufacture.

"Ah, good afternoon, lovely young miss!" He goes to remove his cap before recalling its escape into the swirling wilderness some miles back.

The "miss" was indeed young, but only a grand master of blarney could successfully fit "lovely" into any meaningful description of her. The very fact that Quigley could do so, and actually mean it, owes as much to his current state of desperation as it does to his talents of prevarication.

"Might a humble messenger of God such as myself trouble you for a taste of water, perhaps even a morsel of food?" Quigley, in his hour of need, invests little time in the usual preluding pleasantries. The woman acts as though entirely unaware of him.

After a moment of silence, Quigley continues, "I desire not to be of any inconvenience, but I believe God has sent me to you today, my child."

The woman continues drawing water without consideration of "God's messenger." Her lack of response sticks a finger in the eye of Quigley's normally unflappable manner. Irritated, he dislodges his formidable girth from its throne and wades through the thick air to roost directly beside her. As he reaches to tap her shoulder, the woman lifts her head, and in a single swift motion swings the brimming bucket at Quigley. The impact of the full bucket flushes all breath from him. As Quigley gasps in surprised dismay, water fills his open mouth, drowning him in a cascading fist of respiration-robbing refreshment. He drops to the ground, doubling over in choking paroxysms worthy of star billing, if only he had been acting. Black specters crowd into Quigley's purview, invisible toughs preventing air from admission. He is suffocating, about to die in a desolate world unworthy of him. Quigley wants to

be angry, if only he had space for it. He dimly determines he will indulge in such emotion in the afterlife. After a brief struggle, he relents to the darkness, leaving woman and mules behind to negotiate whatever comes next.

II

A smell, inchoate but pleasantly persistent, hand-holds Quigley back to existence. The aromatic promise of food coaxes tongue to semiconscious lips like a piping snake charmer entices cobra from its basket. Though his eyes remain closed, Quigley senses the embrace of clean sheets, a velvety suggestion that he has been, after all, afforded entry into the “good place” despite a life of grifty transgression.

A smile begins to paint Quigley’s countenance in anticipation of gold-plated eternity, only to freeze in mid-travel when his eyelids uncurtain, instead, on the lugubrious visage looming above him. Whiskery jowls and liver spotted pate enjoin at a thatchy ridge of impenetrable eyebrow, all of it crouched in the shadow of two fleshy, pock-ravaged nostrils. Intricate tendrils of drool cling like stalactites from the man’s lower lip as though he were in Pavlovian thrall. Could such an unfortunate face be that of a celestial wet-nurse? Quigley doubted it mightily.

“Am I in hell?” He asks the bedside presence.

“Ay?” The old man leans over Quigley in wizened askance, a vague question accompanied by the soury redolence of chewing tobacco and corn whiskey. Even as Quigley’s mouth opens to repeat his query, it stops, unhinged and voiceless. Peering over the man’s left shoulder is another face. A face as alluring as any Quigley can remember in all the miles and all the years of his travail.

“He’s awake papa!” A young woman, perhaps 25, smiles sweetly at Quigley.

She hugs the shabby old man’s neck in apparent glee. “Papa” grunts an incoherent reply – did he say “plumper?” Quigley cannot be certain. Without additional comment, the old man clambors shakily erect and shuffles from the room, leaving Quigley alone with this heavenly embodiment of corporeal divinity.

To Quigley she says, “I’ll bet you are hungry. I have a nice barley soup ready on the stove. We’ll get you feeling better in no time t’all!”

He is so smitten at the sight of the girl that he can only nod in supplicated affirmation, his heart burbling with a fluttery notion that could only be the genesis of love itself. Soon the exquisite angel sits bedside, bowl in hand, gently spooning thin but delicious broth into his waiting gob. She assures her supine guest that he is, indeed, still among the living. His assailant was her little sister, Thelmaline, who was so startled at the touch of Quigley that she struck out before realizing he was a preacher man. She and Thelmaline live with their old father here on this farm, some three miles from town. That her father is crazy and nearly deaf, and that her sister is deaf and nearly crazy - that she is really all there is left to take care of things since her mother passed. That it is a pretty hard life, but they do the best they can. That her name is Edna.

Edna. His heart sings to the musical cadence of her every word, even as his ear registers the sad retelling of her family's travails. Soup warms its way through him, and Quigley's spirit rallies. Bit by bit, his essence returns with its brimming suitcase of connivances.

He reaches out for the delicate fingers of his Florence Nightingale, entwining his own stubby tentacles around them, "You are so kind. And so beautiful."

A calculated flattery that has the added benefit of being completely authentic. Edna colors slightly, her eyes flicking away in modest reserve. Her bearing stirs a flustery passion in Quigley, who sits up slightly to camouflage his mounting affections. Edna hastens to reposition the pillows behind her corpulent guest.

"Are you in pain?" she asks in a voice feigning innocent concern.

Quigley, his ardor remastered with some difficulty, reaches to clasp Edna's hand once more.

"Dear, dear Edna," intones Quigley in his most melliferous croon, "The only pain is in my heart, which threatens to escape my very chest at this moment. I am wounded, yea, smitten in the presence of your loveliness."

It is a bold statement from such a toadish man twice her age. Edna hastily disengages her hand, stands up and steps away from the bed in a single motion.

"I think it's time to rest again, Mr. Preacher," she says with calculated gentility.

Her evident discomfort at his advances temporarily wounds Quigley, who belatedly adjudges her isolated desperation insufficient fuel in itself to ignite appropriate desire for him. No matter. He has been rebuffed many times before, by women far more worldly than this tender girl. Quigley merely considers his next tactic of engagement, and awaits opportunity.

Several minutes pass before Edna, in a humble manner of virtue and godly-spiritedness, returns to the bedside of the porcine invalid. As soon as she is within range, Quigley apologizes shamefacedly for his forwardness, declaring it the unfortunate byproduct of his injuries. Edna peers down with a smile of sweet forgiveness, and encamps again beside her meaty lodger.

After a few minutes of pleasant silence, Quigley peers lovingly up at his comely benefactor, "Edna," he asks, "are you a child of God?"

She quickly avers that she is.

"Do you love the Lord with all your heart?"

Again, she answers in the affirmative.

"Well, Edna, I believe that God has sent me to your doorstep." Quigley pats Edna's hand as he says this.

She smiles at him – the avid look in her eye could only be agreement. Gently his hand seeks to enfold hers, and she does not deny its repossession.

"When you serve God's Messenger," he assures her, "you serve the Lord Himself."

The statement seems to take Edna by surprise. She looks askance of her visitor, who quietly nods his head for emphasis.

"Edna, do you wish to serve the Lord?"

Edna assures Quigley that she and her family, that her little community, all serve the Lord at every opportunity.

"In fact, we plan to serve the Lord again this very Sunday!" she confirms.

"Well, if you plan to serve the Lord, then you do right to serve his humble servant. So the Lord granted your wish by bringing me to your door!" Quigley smiles, a bit too suggestively, at this last statement.

Edna pauses momentarily, as if weighing the audacity of Quigley's pronouncements.

Presently, she stands up and announces, "Well Mr. Preacher, if I'm going to serve you, the very first thing I need to do is get you clean!"

She smiles broadly, assured that she is getting about God's business, and

leaves the room to pursue its completion. Quigley chuckles at the woman's enthusiasm, even as desire continues its sanguinary collection within him. He positions his head back on the pillow for a quick catnap.

"A man's got to get his strength up for what lies ahead. And the joy of the Lord is my strength."

Quigley awakens a short time later to the sound of thunder outside. "Perhaps it will finally rain?" he thinks placidly. Even as he ponders the return of his imagined par amour, she reappears at his side, a large tin cup of steaming liquid in her right hand extended toward him.

"The water is almost ready Mr. Preacher. Here, I made this for you. It will soften you right up." She stoops to proffer the concoction to Quigley, its scent filling the air with sweet intoxication. He takes the cup from Edna, making sure that his fingers linger caressingly on her outstretched hand as long as possible. Extracting a long sip from the grayish container, he smiles broadly at the taste of its sweetly potent nectar. Senses begin to dim almost immediately. Liquor had often been his handmaiden in the art of conquest. Now it is being used on him? *Oh, the irony*, he thinks. He looks again at Edna, who is smiling deliciously above him. She will make him very happy, he thinks. Very happy indeed. As his eyes travel hungrily down the curves of her body, Quigley sleepily notices that she clutches something in her left hand. What is that? With great effort, he makes out a tangled mass of carrots, encased in weeping crumbles of arid soil. He wants to thank Edna for digging them up just for him, but finds his tongue too thick to work of its own accord. Dimly promising himself that he will remember to thank her later, Quigley tips his head back to receive the final drops of Edna's elixir. As he slips into happy slumber, he hears the sound of rain beginning an earnest drumbeat on the roof above him, a rhythm in accord with that of his own heart.

III

Dawn breaks in uncommon splendor over a world refreshed and clear-eyed once more. A mild, sunny Sunday progresses to midday heights of singular brilliance, the swirling nightmare of a few dozen yesterdays already vanquished memories to the tiny group of churchgoers gathered around a picnic feast of their own design. Small mountains of food, so uncommonly seen during this, the season's driest month, festoon tables in delectable array. The event's attendees, twenty-seven in all, marvel aloud at God's bounty as

they help themselves repeatedly to its savory offerings. Mrs. Marwell's custard pie gleans ample praise, as does Alice Charson's sweet potato bread and old lady Arthur's fresh apple butter. But the most repeated hymn of culinary appreciation is sung for Edna Packer and her glorious stew, as rich and flavorful as any ever tasted in these parts.

Edna sits, smiling humbly at each tendered tribute she receives. Presently, Minister Edwards, the shepherd of this grazing flock, parks across from his beatific parishioner, plate in hand.

"I hear the stew is beyond delicious, Miss Packer." He smiles at Edna, who shyly returns in kind.

The minister is not immune to the girl's comeliness, and being himself rather young and unattached, he frequently fancies a future with Edna, her delicate hands composing loving meals in his own kitchen. He dips a serving spoon into the stew, releasing delectable odors that make his mouth tickle with anticipation. He extracts a large serving into his bowl, which he sets in front of him.

"Is this an old family recipe of your mother's?"

Before he can settle in to Edna's response or to her fine stew, a tap on his shoulder hails the presence of Mrs. Cox. The minister sighs inwardly and turns to greet the dyspeptic woman, whose exceeding woes invariably require detailed review, and a generous dollop of prayerful consideration.

As the minister is thus engaged, Edna observes, to her abundant horror, that a fly has emerged from the stewy depths of the minister's bowl, and is in mid-portage across a piece of floating carrot. Edna tries to shoo the winged sojourner from their company, but the tiny intruder is not so easily dissuaded from its enterprise. Finally, seeing that the minister is about to return to his dinner and desperate that he not see the fly frolicking therein, Edna reaches out a napkined hand, scoops carrot and creature from the bowl, and crushes the folded contents into permanent quietude.

With Mrs. Cox temporarily addressed, the minister returns his attention to happier tasks. He takes a lusty slurp of stew, and allows the murmur of great satisfaction to escape his lips.

"Oh this is good, Miss Packer. This is fine stew, indeed." He burps quietly into his handkerchief, then adds, "A fellow could get mighty used to eating so well."

The minister's mouth closes abruptly, belatedly shocked at its own

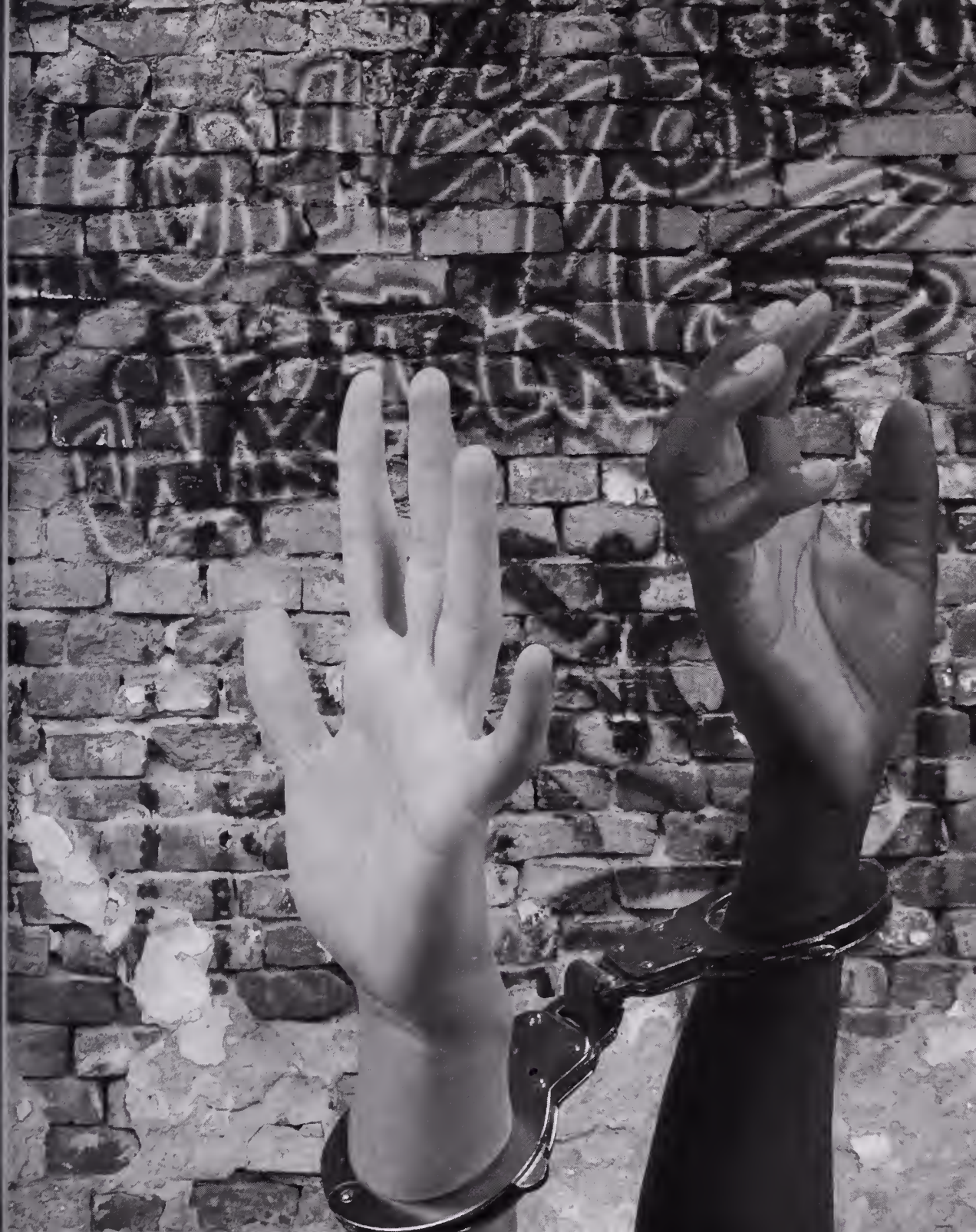
candor. Edna lifts her napkin to hide the blush warming her cheeks.

"Minister Edwards, it would be our pleasure to have you for dinner any time you like." She smiles meaningfully at him, and in that instant, he knows she means it.

After a pause, the minister, his insides now warm with more than just the meaty stew, declares, "Isn't it a glorious day to serve the Lord?"

"Amen!" respond several sated congregants within earshot.

"Amen," says Edna.



Ghost Dance

Sam Reed never liked the wide-open fields. He said that they made him dizzy. I don't know if I can believe it. There was always a fine line between love and hate, and Sam Reed perched right on top of it.

In twenty years he would return to Kansas with half a leg and not know what to do with his life. Strange to think that he traded the Midwestern plains for something equally open: the Middle East. Maybe, secretly, it reminded him of home. He'd never admit it.

But that's what I think.

When we were in high school, Reed had a nice Chevy. It made me jealous but never seemed to bring him any happiness. I guess that's just the way things are. He let me ride in it once. We drove west toward the Rocky Mountains. And he told me the legend of the Minotaur, how when he was a child he'd been obsessed with the idea of an albino American Buffalo. How the idea haunted him like flies and how he could not extirpate it from his head. He made an argument for the scientific importance of such a find, saying that if he'd even gotten just a glimpse of one, certain ailments of the human spirit would be banished from the race indefinitely. I couldn't say how much of that was fact, but he seemed to believe it. I asked him what he was trying to pull. I asked him why he needed to go making up stories where no stories were wanted.

But then he told me, "What I didn't know at the time was that the American Bison was all but extinct. You'd be lucky to find a single one, and brown at that." I shut up then.

That day, Reed took me to this great spot where the stream got deep enough to swim in. It was tucked away about a half mile from a back road.

"We're in the middle of nowhere," I joked.

When we reached the water, I was surprised by its clarity. He assured me that it was pure enough to drink. The trees along the high, caved bank hung clear across the water. We scaled their trunks and swung from the low hanging branches. All along the water's edge bloomed delicate pink pyrola and long-leaved phlox, which showed intensely from deep within their dark foliage.

We didn't bring trucks and were naked, and the water was cold from the mountains. Once we tried to swim up stream in hopes of reaching the headspring, but we never did.

Reed told me about Bigfoot, Sasquatch, and the Yeti. I didn't believe him. He'd gone too far. He told me all of the things that he'd never told anyone else, whispered them to me as if someone eavesdropping would hear and tell. I had to promise that I'd never say a word. He told me to pinky swear. I said that it was childish, but he insisted.

We splashed around for a while. We talked about Greek monsters and Greek

heroes. And once, we may have heard something rustle in the milkweed.

By ten in the morning, light had begun to pierce the canopy overhead. It flecked the water as it rippled downstream and the luminous, green moss that rose up on either side of the rivulet. We grew afraid that we'd be caught on private property, so Reed said that we'd best get out of the water; there was no one around for miles. No one knew that we were there. No one could find us. The trees and the cattails and all the tall, flowering bushes concealed us. We were completely alone. I did as he said. I could tell that he was frightened.

We'd already gotten out of the water and dried off before he mentioned the leeches. We were just glad to not have gotten any. At that point, we put our clothes back on. He said that was a close one. I couldn't figure out how he could be so certain.

"Once," he said, "I saw a blue crane pass in front of the white face of the moon. An experience like that would make any man certain." But Sam Reed wasn't a man. He thought he was, but in the end, he turned out to be no more than a scared kid.

The wind passed through the grass and it rustled. There was a patch of trees way off at the other end of the field. Reed called it a forest. I said that this field could be just as wide as the state of Kansas, if I didn't know any better. But he didn't listen.

We stood to watch the branches bend over sideways in the gale. And for a moment we were quiet. Reed thought he saw something move somewhere among the trees in the distance. He said we should go see. So we took off through the prairie in excited pursuit.

The grasses were brittle and yellow. They reached upward above our heads. The stalks snapped as we pushed in between them. Our bodies and the grasses meshed as we moved. We did not stop. We ran, with our hands stretched out as the prairie parted in front of us, cutting a trail all the way through to the other side of the clearing.

We ran so quickly that I needed to stop, but Reed wouldn't. He said that if we stopped now, whatever was out there would get away. We pushed through, following what he said were prints in the mud. He outlined what he said was a hoof, or maybe a paw. I couldn't see what he meant, but I followed anyway.

Eventually the trees began to grow thicker. Saplings and shrubbery clogged the underbrush. Leaves and branches slapped me in the face. My hand was cut on thorny hydrangeas. My knee was scraped across the bark of a maple. Many times I figured that we wouldn't find a way through, but Reed always managed. Strange birds called down from above. Their songs were mystical and chilling. Strange animals stirred in the lilac bushes. We never saw any of them. For a moment, the syringa would shudder, and afterwards, the forest seemed more alive than it had a moment earlier.

By now, the woods had grown too dark for me to see. I couldn't make out

much in the inky shade, but still, the noises grew. The sounds of the birds. The sad howling of beasts. Once, I was sure I heard the grunt and heavy breath of some massive creature—a mammal, maybe. Reed said we were going in the right direction. He could feel it.

"We are getting close. The Minotaur, I know that he is here. I know that he is here somewhere." Still we pushed on.

And still, I couldn't make out much of anything. Finally, there was a light. There was a small light shining far in the distance.

"Where are we going?" I asked. He did not answer, but kept on, pushing leaves and branches from his face.

"Where are we going?"

It was useless. He was gone, and I was trailing at his heels. I had to do everything I could to merely keep sight of him.

"Where are we going?" He did not answer.

The patch of light grew. It was warm and golden. The forest was quickly enveloped by it. Irish moss and ferns and prehistoric fronds all glinted. The vaulted canopy was illuminated. And suddenly, as quickly as we'd descended into the dark woods, we entered back into light. I dropped to the ground, panting and clutching at my stomach. Sam Reed stood still.

"Have you found it?" I coughed. "Is it here?"

He did not answer. Did I taste blood? I couldn't tell. My head was heavy. It pounded, but I eventually managed to lift my face to look. It was a large clearing, but not as large as the last. Covering the ground entirely was a layer of yellow flowers that came up, in dense clumps, to his knee. He bent over and picked one.

"Daisies," he said. "I would never have predicted daisies."

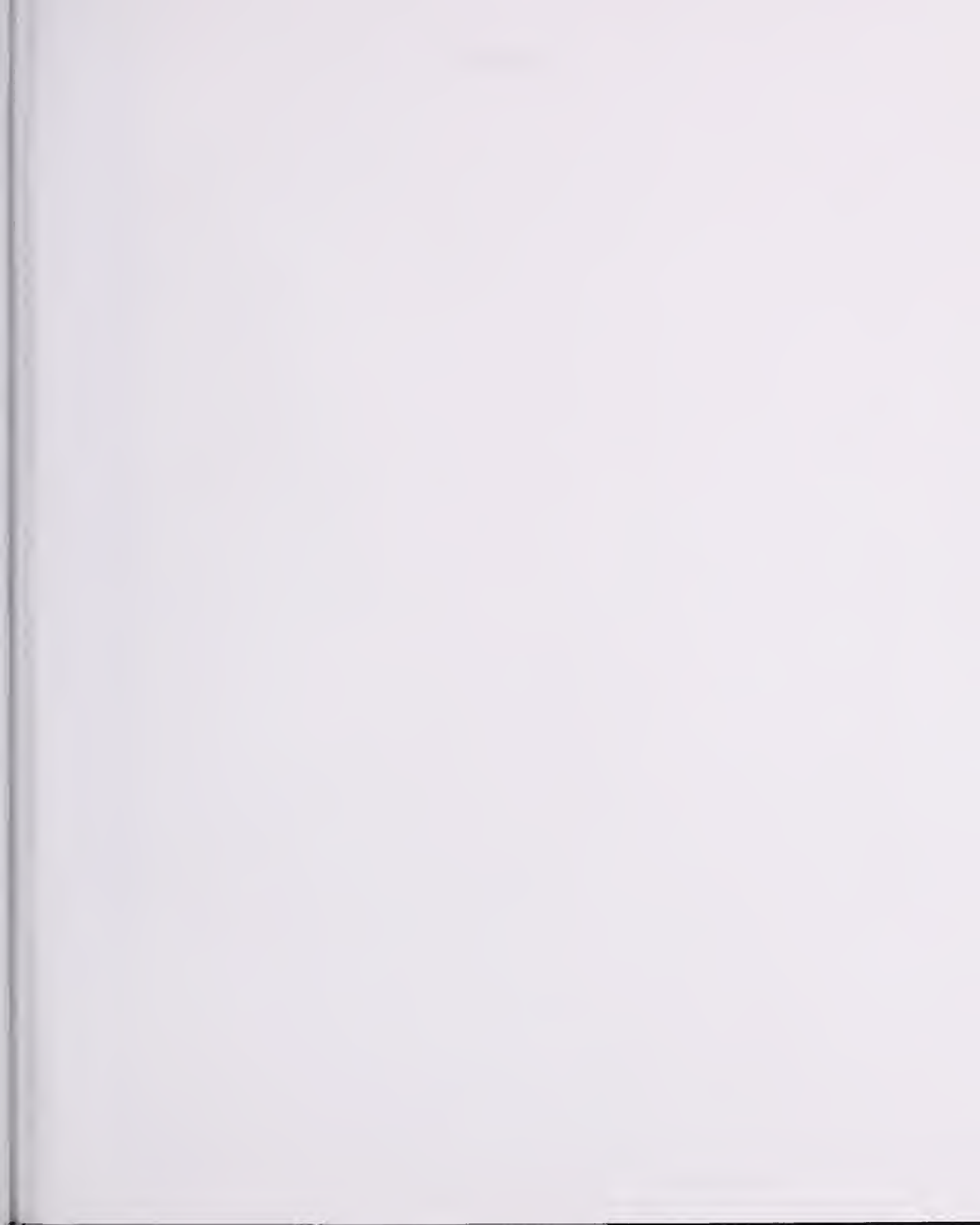
He stood there for a moment. I couldn't guess what he was feeling. Then he collapsed to the ground.

"I'm so happy right now. I wish that everything could stay this way forever. I wish I could just sit here for the rest of my life, and nothing would ever change. Nothing. Nothing at all."

He closed his eyes and lay down on his side. He curled himself into a ball and slept amid the wildflowers.

Human Cradle

Strange marauding thoughts streak through my mind
Embarassing me
Though these memories may linger like the scent of you
They will eventually dissipate
Sinking back into the darkness from
Whence they originated
Spindly dwindling moments left etched on eager ears
I could not bear to carry such a burden on my tongue
So I swallowed down everything you told me to
With devotion in my heart
Good intent in my hands
I was the womb for all the dreams you hoped to conceive
Lacteal truths would be my anguish undone
But stillborn were your promises
And now they wreak havoc in my soul
Causing me to dwell on corruption so
Bitter
Sweet
To the touch
Sweat dangling from the hands that toiled over your beloved
And now it's dying
Within my hollow shell of a body
I tie a string to you
Hoping that you may draw out
That which belongs to you
Devour it straight from my pulse
And seldom speak of us again
But somehow
This umbilical cannot be severed



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